

*Proclus'*  
*Commentary*  
*on the*  
*Cratylus*  
*in Context*

ANCIENT THEORIES OF  
LANGUAGE AND NAMING

R.M. VAN DEN BERG

PHILOSOPHIA ANTIQUA - VOLUME 112

BRILL

## Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* in Context

# Philosophia Antiqua

A Series of Studies on Ancient Philosophy

*Previous Editors*

J.H. Waszink†  
W.J. Verdenius†  
J.C.M. van Winden

*Edited by*

K.A. Algra  
F.A.J. De Haas  
J. Mansfeld  
C.J. Rowe  
D. T. Runia  
Ch. Wildberg

VOLUME 112

# Proclus' *Commentary* *on the Cratylus* in Context

Ancient Theories of Language and Naming

*By*

R. M. van den Berg



BRILL

LEIDEN • BOSTON  
2008

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

ISSN 0079-1687

ISBN 978 90 04 16379 9

Copyright 2008 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.  
Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Hotei Publishing,  
IDC Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated,  
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,  
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission  
from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by  
Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to  
The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910,  
Danvers, MA 01923, USA.  
Fees are subject to change.

PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

*To Judith*



## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	xi
Introduction .....	xiii
Chapter One	
Plato's <i>Cratylus</i> and Aristotle's <i>De Interpretatione</i> : Setting the Scene .....	1
1. Introduction .....	1
2. The <i>Cratylus</i> : an outline .....	2
3. Towards a dialectical interpretation of the <i>Cratylus</i> .....	8
4. Aristotle on names: <i>De Interpretatione</i> .....	20
5. Aristotle on language and philosophy .....	24
6. Conclusive remark: Plato, Aristotle and the issue of the correctness of names .....	28
Chapter Two	
The Middle Platonists: Constructing Platonic Doctrines .....	31
1. Introduction .....	31
2. Background: Stoic and Epicurean theories of language .....	33
3. A handbook on the <i>Cratylus</i> : Alcinous <i>Didaskalikos</i> c. 6, 159, 43–160, 41 .....	37
4. Tracing back the logical-etymological interpretation: Antiochus of Ascalon .....	43
5. Plutarch of Chaeroneia: the <i>Cratylus</i> as a theological dialogue .....	46
6. Philo of Alexandria .....	51
7. Galen: a dissident voice .....	56
8. Conclusions .....	58
Chapter Three	
Porphyry's Aristotelian Semantic Theory and Proclus' Platonic Criticism of it .....	61
1. Introduction .....	61
2. Plotinus: naming Being .....	62



3. Porphyry .....	68
4. Iamblichus .....	76
5. Proclus .....	81
6. Conclusions .....	91

#### Chapter Four

Proclus' <i>Commentary on the Cratylus</i> (I): The Issue of the Correctness of Names .....	93
1. Introduction .....	93
2. Proclus' notes on the <i>Cratylus</i> .....	94
3. The σκοπός ( <i>In Crat.</i> I): the correctness of names and the human soul .....	96
4. Two characters: two classes of things, two types of names ( <i>In Crat.</i> X–XIV) .....	98
5. A historical excursus ( <i>In Crat.</i> XVI–XVII) .....	103
6. Epicurus and the two meanings of φύσει ( <i>In Crat.</i> XVII) .....	106
7. Socrates' discussion with Hermogenes: the natural correctness of names .....	109
8. Names of mortal individuals ( <i>In Crat.</i> LXXX–XCV) ....	123
9. Proclus on the correctness of names: some conclusions .....	131

#### Chapter Five

Proclus' <i>Commentary on the Cratylus</i> (II): Naming, Dialectic, and the Divine Intellect .....	135
1. Introduction .....	135
2. The dialectical character of the <i>Cratylus</i> ( <i>In Crat.</i> II–IX) .....	135
3. The human legislator/name-giver and the divine Demiurge .....	139
4. Instruments: form and matter ( <i>In Crat.</i> LIII–VIII) .....	147
5. The dialectician: the user of names ( <i>In Crat.</i> LIX–LXVII) .....	156
6. Conclusions .....	160

## Chapter Six

Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* (III): Learning from

Divine Names .....	161
1. Introduction .....	161
2. The nature of divine names ( <i>In Crat. LXXI</i> ) .....	162
3. Divine language: a paradox? ( <i>In Crat.</i> LXXII–LXXIX) .....	170
4. Proclus' commentary on the etymological section .....	173
5. The theological function of etymology .....	174
6. The pedagogical function of etymology: names as playthings.....	187
7. Play and salvation through names.....	192
8. Proclus on the hermeneutics of divine names: concluding remarks .....	196
9. Taking stock: Proclus' interpretation of the <i>Cratylus</i> in five points .....	197

## Chapter Seven

After Proclus .....	201
1. Introduction .....	201
2. Return to the harmony thesis .....	201
3. Theology from divine names .....	211

## Bibliography

1. Editions cited of the principal texts .....	219
2. Secondary literature .....	220

## Indices

1. Index of passages cited .....	229
2. Index of subjects and names .....	237



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is the outcome of a research project entitled “The Reception of Plato’s *Cratylus* in Antiquity: Ancient Theories of Language and Naming”, which was undertaken with the financial support of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) between 2001 and 2006.

I first started thinking seriously about the *Cratylus* when, as a postdoctoral research fellow in Trinity College, Dublin in 2001, I was invited to conduct a seminar on that dialogue in the Dublin Centre for the Study of the Platonic Tradition. I have happy memories of the many, stimulating discussions, in particular with John Dillon and Vasilis Politis.

While working on this book, I greatly enjoyed my regular trips to the De Wulf-Mansion Centre for Ancient and Medieval Philosophy of the K. U. Leuven to partake in the meetings of the team of “Plato Transformed”, a project under the direction of Carlos Steel and Gerd van Riel that is dedicated to the study of Proclus’ and Damascius’ commentaries on Plato. My research has benefited much from these sessions and I am much indebted to all the participants. I owe a special debt to Carlos Steel for his expert advice and untiring assistance in the past years.

Furthermore, I am most grateful to Francesco Ademollo, Luc Brisson, Riccardo Chiaradonna, Cristina D’Ancona, Jan Opsomer, David Sedley, Ineke Sluiter, and Richard Sorabji for their help with and thoughts on particular issues. Brian Duvick kindly sent me a version of his forthcoming translation of Proclus’ *Commentary on the Cratylus*. I am also indebted to the anonymous referee for a number of useful suggestions and constructive criticisms.

Finally, no sooner had I started on this book than Judith came into my life. Her loving support with the book has meant a lot to me. I dedicate it to her with love and gratitude.



## INTRODUCTION

Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* is a unique work. It is the only known and only preserved ancient commentary on that dialogue, signed for by one of the most eminent ancient commentators on Plato. Moreover, its theme is of unparalleled philosophical importance: language. For better or for worse, philosophy cannot do without language. Plato, of course, realized this and the *Cratylus* is his reflection on the relation between language and Platonic philosophy. Likewise Proclus' *Commentary* constitutes a Neoplatonist's reflection on the relation between language and Neoplatonic philosophy. Yet, despite of its uniqueness and importance, the *Commentary* has barely profited from the recent increase of interest in late ancient philosophy. The fragmentary state of the *Commentary* is, no doubt, to a large extent to blame for this neglect. It consists of an excerpt of a student's notes of Proclus' discussion of the *Cratylus*. This study aims at making up for this neglect by reconstructing the outlines of Proclus' discussion of the *Cratylus*.

This book will not be just about Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Marinus reports that when a young Proclus arrived in Athens for the first time, he set out to visit the Acropolis, the home of Athena, the patron goddess of philosophy. He arrived just in time, for as the guard at the gate told him, "Truly, if you had not come, I would have locked up".<sup>1</sup> As Marinus comments, one need not be a seer to understand the significance of this omen. Proclus indeed comes at the end of a long and diverse philosophical tradition that includes, of course, Plato and Platonism, but also Aristotle and the Peripatetics, as well as the Hellenistic schools. This tradition shapes Proclus' philosophy both positively, in the sense that he borrows from it, and negatively, in the sense that he reacts against it. Therefore, this study will not treat Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* in isolation, but will discuss it within the wider context of philosophical reflections on language in Antiquity in general and the history of the reception of the *Cratylus* in particular.

To start with the beginning, chapter one deals with the *Cratylus* itself and compares it to Aristotle's account of language. Much has been said

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marinus *Proclus* § 10, 37–44.

about this dialogue in recent years, and I do not intend to go through all these publications in detail. Instead, I shall highlight a, to my mind central, aspect of the *Cratylus* that tends to be overlooked. The *Cratylus* is, I shall suggest, not primarily a dialogue about the philosophy of language—which as such did not exist in Antiquity—or about linguistics, but a reflection on relation between ὀνόματα (‘names’),<sup>2</sup> the elementary building blocks of language, and Platonic philosophy. It is within this perspective that we should understand the central issue of the *Cratylus*, that of the (in)correctness of names. Hermogenes, one of the three characters in the dialogue, is quite understandably puzzled by the claim that names can actually be incorrect. What, after all, does it mean for a name to be incorrect? From the dialogue it appears that names do not simply mirror reality, but rather reflect the interpretation of reality by the name-giver. By giving names to groups of things, the name-giver divides up the world. This process of division is also a process of definition: we separate one group of things from the rest by identifying their characteristic quality that sets them apart from all other things and that thus defines them. Plato assumes that the etymology of names reveals something of these definitions. From the copious amount of etymologies that make up a substantial part of the *Cratylus*, it appears that the first name-givers were Heracleitians who tried to understand reality by studying the ever-changing sensible world. However, if we wish to divide reality correctly, we should, according to Plato, study the Platonic Forms in the intelligible realm, where things are truly what they are and hence are true objects of scientific inquiry. Incorrect names, then, are names given by name-givers who had an erroneous understanding of reality. Since the name-givers that designed Greek language did not study reality correctly, i.e. in the Platonic way, the Greek language as it stands is likely to be flawed. This may not be much of a problem in everyday life in which ordinary Greek seems to function sufficiently well, but it is in philosophical discussions in which we try to determine the definitions of the things themselves, i.e. the Forms. There, ordinary language may lead us astray both by suggesting incorrect divisions and, through etymology, incorrect definitions. Therefore, the Platonic philosopher needs his own language, a purified and improved version of ordinary language that fits the

---

<sup>2</sup> Not just personal names, but also, and more especially, the names of things, i.e. our nouns.

intelligible realm. Moreover, the analysis of ordinary language and of names in particular is not to be recommended as a method of philosophical investigation. Aristotle, by contrast, takes an altogether different line. Since he rejects the Platonic intelligible world, and since he is confident that sense perception produces reliable concepts of the things in the sensible world, he does not mistrust ordinary language. In fact, he discovers in ordinary language useful starting points for further philosophical investigations.

Given Plato's explicit warnings not to use etymology as a method of philosophical investigation, it comes as a surprise to find that Proclus, like many Platonists before him, assumes that the etymologies from the *Cratylus* provide reliable information about the nature of things. Chapter two traces the origin of this remarkable error back to the Middle Platonists and the Stoics. Whereas Plato had thought little of the philosophical qualities of primitive mankind, Stoics and Platonists became convinced that these people had enjoyed a superior understanding of reality in comparison to contemporary philosophers. They increasingly conceived of philosophy as a project to retrieve this ancient wisdom. One instrument to recover it was etymology. Through etymology one could, so it was believed, discover the definitions of things as developed by the sages of old.

Proclus may have gotten Plato's ideas about etymology completely wrong, he was one of the very few readers of the *Cratylus* in Antiquity who understood that the dialogue presents us with a typical Platonic theory of language that had been designed to suit Platonic metaphysics. In chapter three we shall see that the vast majority of Neoplatonists, following in the footsteps of Porphyry, subscribed to an Aristotelian semantic theory. Porphyry had adopted this Aristotelian theory in order to be able to save Aristotle's *Categories* for Neoplatonism. However, this adoption of Aristotele came with a price. Since the Aristotelian theory only recognizes one type of language, ordinary language based on our sense perception of the sensible universe, it has no place for another type of language based on intelligible reality. Any discussion of metaphysical entities will thus have to be conducted in this ordinary language and by implication be metaphorical. Porphyry and his followers decided to bite the bullet in order to keep Aristotle on board. Proclus, though, did not feel the need to accommodate Aristotle. He clearly understood that the Aristotelian view of language was ill at ease with Platonic metaphysics. In his *Commentary on the Parmenides* he explains in some detail what is wrong with Porphyry's account of language from a Platonic point of



view. His dissatisfaction with the dominant Porphyrian semantic theory was one reason, so it seems, to comment on the *Cratylus*, the dialogue that provides a typically Platonic view of language. Proclus' sustained attacks on Aristotle in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, too, should be understood against the background of his campaign to replace the Aristotelian account of language with a truly Platonic one.

Chapters four up to six analyze the *Commentary on the Cratylus* itself. Given the problematic nature the *Commentary* and the fact that it has been little studied, I have chosen to combine a thematic treatment of the *Commentary* with a detailed discussion of large sections of the text.<sup>3</sup> In chapter four, I shall examine Proclus' interpretation of the issue of the correctness of names. Proclus argues that there exists a natural correctness of names in the case of things that can be known scientifically and a conventional correctness in the case of things that cannot thus be known. The former consists of eternal, unchanging things, including the intelligible Forms and the gods, the latter of individuals. Thus, the fact that we humans are capable of giving natural correct names demonstrates that we are capable of knowledge of metaphysical beings, the same knowledge that makes Platonic philosophy possible. Proclus does not make this type of knowledge the privilege of early mankind. Every human soul is by its very nature capable of it. Moreover, our capacity to have knowledge of this sort is something that we share with the gods. In chapter five, we shall see how Proclus relates human philosophizing and naming to similar activities of the divine Intellect. On this reading the *Cratylus* does not just teach us something about Plato's views about language, it also teaches us something of importance about ourselves. We are able to engage in divine activities, provided that we turn our attention away from the sensible particulars to the eternal universals. In fact, Proclus assumes that driving home this point is the ultimate aim of the *Cratylus*. At the same time, Proclus uses these discussions to criticize Aristotle. Since Aristotle denies the existence of the intelligible Forms, both his theory of language and his philosophical methods are unsatisfactory. Chapter six deals with Proclus' treatment of the etymologies in the *Cratylus*. Since Proclus perceives of Platonic philosophy first and foremost as a sort of theology, he is especially interested in Plato's

---

<sup>3</sup> Since an English translation by B. Duvick is due to appear in the series *Ancient Commentaries on Aristotle* edited by R. Sorabji (= Duvick 2007), I have not myself undertaken an integral translation of the text.

explanations of divine names. The chapter thus discusses Proclus' views on the nature of divine names, the specific function of these names within the context of Proclus' larger philosophical enterprise, the construction of a Platonic theology, and studies some of Proclus' discussions of etymologies from the *Cratylus*.

The after-life of Proclus' interpretation of the *Cratylus* is the topic of the final chapter. Proclus' influence on the very last of the ancient philosophers should not be underestimated. This holds true both generally speaking and in regard to their theories of language. Proclus' claim that the Aristotelian-Porphyrian semantic theory was essentially un-Platonic forced those later Neoplatonists who maintained that Plato and Aristotle were essentially in harmony, to argue for the compatibility of Plato's views from the *Cratylus* with those of Aristotle. At the same time, the theological lessons that Proclus had derived from the etymologies of the divine names continued to be taken seriously, until, finally, the philosophical schools in Athens and Alexandria were swept away by the waves of history. The Middle Ages would adopt the Aristotelian semantic theory, forgetting about the *Cratylus* and Proclus' *Commentary* on it altogether.



## CHAPTER ONE

### PLATO'S *CRATYLUS* AND ARISTOTLE'S *DE INTERPRETATIONE*: SETTING THE SCENE

#### 1. *Introduction*

A study into the reception of the *Cratylus* in Antiquity has almost inevitably got to start with a discussion of the *Cratylus* itself. Once relatively neglected, the dialogue has received its fair share of attention in recent years. In most of these studies the *Cratylus* is presented either as a work about the philosophy of language, a category which as such did not yet exist in Antiquity, or about linguistics, especially because of the many etymologies.<sup>1</sup> Only few publications discuss the *Cratylus* as primarily a dialogue concerning Platonic dialectic. Most ancient interpreters, on the contrast, taking their clue from the fact that Socrates presents names as the instruments of a dialectician, assume that the *Cratylus* deals with the dialectical function of names. Below I shall explore a reading of the *Cratylus* from this dialectical perspective. On the one hand, within the context of the present study, such a discussion will provide a useful foil for the study of the ancient interpretations. On the other hand, as regards the interpretation of the *Cratylus* itself, such an approach will appear to contribute to a better understanding of the dialogue. That is not to say that I adopt the ancient interpretations of the *Cratylus*, nor do I advise that we adopt uncritically ancient readings of Plato in general. There is no reason to assume that these are in principle any better than modern approaches, since they tend to be determined by all kinds of assumptions about Plato and his work that we may find impossible to share. The appreciation of the etymologies from the *Cratylus* as a source of knowledge among later Platonists is a case in point. Plato in the *Cratylus* explicitly warns against using etymology in philosophy. Yet, as we shall see in the next chapter, under the influence of the Stoa

---

<sup>1</sup> As Dalimier 1998: 14 aptly puts it: “il y a le *Cratyle* des philosophes et le *Cratyle* des philologues”.

later Platonists had taken a different attitude towards etymology and thus failed to notice this obvious warning.

The second part of this chapter will focus on Aristotle's view on language as we find it in *De Interpretatione*. There are two reasons for doing so. On the one hand, the remarks about language at the beginning of *De Interpretatione* are often interpreted as Aristotle's reaction against the *Cratylus*. If so, they constitute the first phase in the reception of the *Cratylus*. On the other hand, it is impossible to tell the story of the reception of the *Cratylus* in Antiquity without reference to *De Interpretatione*. The two are often compared to each other and at the end of this chapter I shall undertake such a comparison myself in order to bring out the tension between the two accounts.

## 2. *The Cratylus: an outline*

### 2.1 The discussion with Hermogenes: the natural correctness of names (*Crat.* 383a–391b3)

The *Cratylus* is usually divided into three parts. The first consists in a discussion of Socrates with Hermogenes, the second in a lengthy series of etymologies offered by Socrates, whereas the third consists in an exchange between Socrates and Cratylus. Of these three sections, ancient discussions center especially on the first two. There is good reason for this. The last section undermines the belief so dear to almost the entire later tradition that names are trustworthy sources of information about the nature of things so that they may have felt inclined to omit it, be it perhaps unconsciously.

The *Cratylus* begins with the successful attempt by Hermogenes, whose eagerness for learning excels his philosophical skills by far, to involve Socrates into a discussion about the correctness of “names” (ὀνόματα), i.e. whether they have a natural correctness or that their correctness depends on convention only. Before Socrates arrived at the scene, Cratylus—a Heracleitian who according to Aristotle was one of Plato's teachers—had claimed the former, yet had refused to explain to Hermogenes his reasons for holding this view while teasing him by adding that, according to this natural correctness ‘Hermogenes’ is not Hermogenes’ name. Hermogenes now asks Socrates to shed some light on the matter. Socrates first makes Hermogenes elaborate on his position that “no name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only

because of the rules and usage of those who establish the usage and call it by that name” (*Crat.* 384d5–7). In support of his argument he points to the fact that we can easily rename our slaves (*Crat.* 384d5), as well as the fact that there exists a broad variety of languages in which the same things bear different names (*Crat.* 385d7–e3).<sup>2</sup>

Socrates first makes Hermogenes reject the views hold by Protagoras and Euthydemus. From this it is concluded that

**T. 1.1** it is clear that things have some stable essence of their own (δηλον δὴ ὅτι αὐτὰ αὐτῶν οὐσίαν ἔχοντά τινα βέβαιόν ἐστι τὰ πράγματα).<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, Hermogenes has also to admit that because of this we should not do as we like when we set out to do something, but that we should take the nature of things into consideration if we want to be successful in our operations. One may, e.g., try to prune a vine with a table knife, but it is not likely that this is going to be a success. Likewise, since naming is an action concerning things with a fixed nature of their own, one cannot, as Hermogenes had assumed earlier on, do as one wishes. Hence, there exists a natural correct way of naming things.

Socrates now concludes:

**T. 1.2** Ὀνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστὶν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος (*Crat.* 388b13–c1).

This is an important sentence, yet its meaning is not entirely unambiguous. Is an ὄνομα a tool for two purposes, i.e. and teaching and dividing being or is the καὶ explicative? To judge by the examples of other instruments to which Socrates ascribes only one function, the latter

---

<sup>2</sup> I take it that this passage is only intended to outline Hermogenes’ position, not to refute it. Many modern commentators, though, assume that it contains an argument against Hermogenes. They point to *Crat.* 385a in particular, where Hermogenes agrees with Socrates that on his account one may personally use the name ‘horse’ for what is commonly referred to as ‘man’ and vice versa. According to them, Hermogenes’ admission implicitly undermines his position, since it will result in a Babel-like confusion and thus make communication in general and philosophy in particular impossible (see, e.g., Baxter 1992: 21; Sluiter 1997: 183–184). However, as has been observed by at least one modern commentator (Barney 1997: 15), these interpreters “tend to talk as though Hermogenes *demand*ed that everyone adopt constantly changing private naming conventions”. Since Hermogenes does not demand this at all, it is difficult to see how this passage can be an argument against Hermogenes, especially because Plato nowhere gives us a clue that he intends this passage to be such an argument.

<sup>3</sup> *Crat.* 386d9–e1. All translations of the *Cratylus* have been taken from Reeve 1998.

interpretation, adopted by most modern scholars, seems the more likely one.<sup>4</sup> We should thus read:

So, a name is a tool for giving instruction, that is to say for dividing being, just as a shuttle is a tool for dividing warp and woof.

But what does Socrates mean by “dividing up being”? From *Crat.* 388b10f. it appears that he means that names should divide up things “according to their natures” (τὰ πράγματα διακρίνομεν ἧ ἔχει). Coining words apparently requires an understanding of the natural division of things and cannot, therefore, be successfully practiced by just anybody. Instead, it is the job of a very rare sort of craftsman (*Crat.* 389a2f.: τῶν δημιουργῶν σπανιώτατος ἐν ἀνθρώποις), a sort of rule-setter (νομοθέτης) who provides us with the names to use.

Next, Socrates addresses Hermogenes’ argument for the conventionalist position, i.e. the fact that different peoples speak different languages.<sup>5</sup> Different languages indeed consist of different sets of sounds, but, Socrates claims, this does not undermine his thesis of natural correctness. Any name that does what a name should do, i.e. teaching by dividing up being in a natural manner, is a good name, regardless of how it sounds. He compares this to various blacksmiths, Greek and barbarians ones, who all share the same idea of what a good drill is like, yet embody it in different pieces of iron. In the same way, one and the same idea of what a name is (τὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος εἶδος) may be embodied in various sounds.

If one comes to think about it, Socrates’ claim that dividing being is the task of names is an odd one. It is, after all, far more natural to assume with Aristotle, about whom more below, that the function of names is to communicate our thoughts to each other. Socrates now makes another, somewhat unexpected claim by introducing out of the blue the person of the dialectician. On the assumption that the one who knows best what an instrument should look like is the one who uses it, it is argued that this person should supervise the activity of the craftsman who fabricates the instrument. In the case of the name-giver, this is the dialectician, the one “who knows how to ask and answer questions.”<sup>6</sup> It should be born in mind that although Hermogenes is

---

<sup>4</sup> For scholars advocating this interpretation, see Sedley 2003: 60–61. For the view that names have actually a twofold function, see, e.g., Guthrie 1978: 19.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 389a5–390a10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 390b1–391b3.

acquainted with Socrates and an amateur of philosophy, he is by no means a skilled Platonic philosopher. Moreover, the Platonic Forms, the object of dialectical discourse, are hinted at only at the very end of the dialogue, so one would expect him to be a little more puzzled about the introduction of this dialectician than in fact he is.

## 2.2 The etymological section (*Crat.* 391b4–427d3)

Once Socrates has established that there exists something like the natural correctness of names, he goes on to investigate what this correctness entails. He does so by analyzing an enormous collection of names from which it appears that they are informative about the opinions of the name-givers concerning the objects that they named. This section is hence known as the “etymological section”.<sup>7</sup> From an analysis of names in Homer it turns out that in the case of a correct name “the being of the thing is in control and is expressed in the name”, regardless the sounds used to express this.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the names ‘Hector’, derived by Socrates from ἔχειν, ‘to have’, ‘to hold’, and ‘Astyanax’, literally ‘Lord of the City’, are two different names that are both equally suited for kings, since they both indicate that Hector and his son are members of the ruling class. Socrates now continues by analyzing the names of various mythological heroes as they appear in Homer and elsewhere. From the fact that one of these, Atreus, was a son of Zeus, Socrates gets to discuss the names of the gods Zeus, Cronus and Uranus. Socrates regrets it that he is unable to remember “Hesiod’s genealogy, and even the earlier ancestors of the gods he mentions” (*Crat.* 396c3–6). All the same, Socrates takes advantage of the fact that he is in the grip of some divine wisdom—something for which he blames Euthyphro, the religious fanatic who is also known from the Platonic dialogue called after him—and continues by discussing a wide variety of names of deities, partly those known from the Homeric pantheon, but also including those of the heavenly bodies and related entities such as the elements, of the seasons, and the year. Next follows a whole new series of etymologies of names in the field of ethics, those to do with emotive states, with judgement, as well as of the “finest and most important names”, which appear to be names of philosophical entities such as

---

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that Socrates does not practice etymology in the ancient sense of the word, see pp. 34–35.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 393d4–5.



‘truth’, ‘falsehood’, ‘being’, and ‘name’. What is especially remarkable about this second batch of names is that they all testify of a Heracleitian world-view according to which everything is always moving. Socrates explicitly points this out to Hermogenes at the start of the series, in a crucial passage to which we shall come back below:

**T. 1.3** Most of our wise men nowadays get so dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of the things that are, that the things themselves appear to them to be turning around and moving every which way. Well, I think that the people who gave things their names in very ancient times are exactly like these wise men. They don’t blame this on their own internal condition, however, but on the nature of the things themselves, which they think are never stable or steadfast, but flowing and moving, full of every sort of motion and constant coming into being. I say this because the names you just mentioned put me in mind of it (*Crat.* 411b3–6).

### 2.3 The discussion with Cratylus: the importance of conventionalism (*Crat.* 427d4–440e7)

Cratylus could not have agreed more with Socrates: this is exactly how he sees it! Yet, Socrates urges Cratylus to subject the outcome of the discussion so far to closer scrutiny, since he does not altogether trust the inspiration that triggered the analyses of names in the previous section. Soon it turns out that their views do not entirely square. Both agree that correctly given names are imitations of their objects, yet Cratylus denies that names allow for degrees of likeness. A name is a perfect likeness of its object. If it is not, it is no name at all, just noise as if someone “were banging a brass pot” (*Crat.* 430a5–7). Socrates tries to convince Cratylus that this is not the case. Among other things, he argues that names themselves consist of a sort of elementary names. These are sounds that imitate certain qualities. The ‘l’-sound, for example, imitates softness. Yet even though the Greek word for hardness, σκληρότης, contains this ‘l’-sound, Greeks still know what it means because of convention. From this Socrates concludes that convention contributes something to the process of communication. Socrates describes his position, which I take to be that of Plato, as follows:

**T. 1.4** I myself prefer the views that names should be as much like things as possible, but I fear that defending this view is like hauling a ship up a sticky ramp, as Hermogenes suggested, and that we have to make use of that worthless thing, convention, in the correctness of names (*Crat.* 435c3–6)

Socrates does not force Cratylus to express agreement with him, but quizzes him about the function of names. In line with the foregoing discussion with Hermogenes, Cratylus responds that the function of a name is to give instruction, yet he adds something else: according to him, the simple truth is that to know a thing's name is to know the thing itself (*Crat.* 435d4–6). Thus, names are instruments of discovery: to discover the name of a thing is to discover what that thing is itself. Socrates rings the alarm bell: suppose that the first name-givers were mistaken about the things that they named. In that case we shall be misled by their names:

**T. 1.5** Socrates: “It is clear that the first name-giver gave names to things based on his conception of what those things were like. Isn’t that right?”

Cratylus: “Yes.”

Socrates: “And if his conception was incorrect and he gave names based on it, what do you suppose will happen to us if we take him as our guide? Won’t we be deceived?” (*Crat.* 436b5–11)

Cratylus, still refusing to let go of his refuted position that names that are in any way deficient are not names at all, points to the fact that all the names that Socrates has previously discussed are based on the same assumption, i.e. that everything is constantly moving and changing. Surely, this is an important indication that the things have been named correctly! Socrates now undertakes a last round of analyzing names, etymologizing afresh some of the names that he had just discussed, but now in such a way that they indicate that all things are at rest. Hence Cratylus’ argument has been refuted. Socrates furthermore points out that the name-givers, if indeed their names are an expression of their knowledge needed to have acquired this knowledge before there were names. Hence they acquired this knowledge without the help of names. Apparently, then, there are ways to get to know the things through themselves, and this seems to be a more reliable path to knowledge than etymology:<sup>9</sup>

**T. 1.6** How to learn and make discoveries about the things that are is probably too large a topic for you or me. But we should be content to

---

<sup>9</sup> Note that Plato has been sowing clues all along the way, see, e.g., his discussions of the names of Hermes and Pan in which he underlines the deceptive side of language (*Crat.* 407e1–408d5). Cf. also his observation about δικαιοσύνη (*Crat.* 412c7ff.): it is easy to etymologize the name δικαιοσύνη but what it really means is difficult to discover.

have agreed that it is far better to investigate them and learn about them through themselves than to do so through their names (*Crat.* 439b4–8).

Notwithstanding the suggestion to the contrary just mentioned (*Crat.* 437a–c), Socrates appears to assume that those etymologies that suggest that everything is constantly changing are the correct ones.<sup>10</sup> The first name-givers indeed assumed that everything is in a state of constant flux. Socrates now calls the flux doctrine of the first name-givers and Cratylus into question. He begins by opposing beautiful faces and the like which indeed seem to be in a state of flux, to beauty itself which forever remains the same. If everything is in a process of change it will be impossible to say correctly (*Crat.* 439d8: προσειπεῖν ὀρθῶς) about anything that it is such as it is. On this account, even knowledge (γνώσις) would be subjected to change and hence would change into something other than knowledge. However, if there is to be unchanging knowledge, there have to be unchanging objects of knowledge such as beauty itself as well. This passage clearly hints at the Platonic Forms. At this point, however, Socrates bids farewell to Cratylus and Hermogenes, thus drawing the meeting to a close.

### 3. *Towards a dialectical interpretation of the Cratylus*

#### 3.1 An ingressive interpretation of the discussion with Hermogenes: the *Cratylus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Statesman*

As was noted in the introduction, the ancient interpretations of the *Cratylus* made much of Socrates' claim that names are primarily the instruments of the dialectician. There is something very odd about the sudden appearance of the dialectician in the dialogue. Charles Kahn aptly observes about the way in which the dialectician is introduced in the *Cratylus* and the *Euthydemus*: "These two passages are truly proleptic, in that they must strike the reader as enigmatic in their context. They require an explanation that will be provided only in a later text."<sup>11</sup> Kahn makes this remark in his groundbreaking book on Plato and the Socratic dialogue in which he puts forward the thesis that many of

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 439c3–4.

<sup>11</sup> Kahn 1996: 61. Cf. also Ackrill 1994: 21: "For now the person said to be expert in using names... is the *dialectician*, 'the man who can ask and answer questions' (390c10). A surprising assertion, and it is necessary to draw upon other dialogues to interpret it."

the earlier works lead up towards the later dialogues, i.e. that they are designed to prepare the reader for the views expounded in the later dialogues. He calls his approach to earlier works from the perspective of later ones an 'ingressive interpretation' of Plato. About the *Cratylus* he has not much more to say since it falls outside the set of related dialogues that he has singled out for discussion in his book. He remarks, though, that the *Cratylus* lies on a path leading to such dialogues as the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.<sup>12</sup> Plato clearly wishes us to read the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* in connection, as appears from the fact that the latter is presented as a sequel to the former. Yet, there is a third dialogue that should be added to this group, the *Statesman*, which itself is a sequel to the *Sophist*.<sup>13</sup> Reading the *Cratylus* from the perspective of these two dialogues seems indeed, to my view, to contribute to our understanding of it. Put briefly, my point will be that the *Cratylus* constitutes a meditation on the function of language in Platonic dialectic, before the dialectical method itself is presented in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. If one reads through the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*, one soon finds that the upshot of the discussion in the *Cratylus* is applied to the dialectical exercises in both dialogues. By way of illustration, I shall now briefly discuss some relevant passages from those two dialogues.

The *Sophist* deals, naturally, with attempts to define the sophist by means of dialectical division: i.e. by dividing up reality mostly, though not necessarily, into two and again and again until one has completely isolated the thing under discussion and thus established what it is. However, before setting out on the hunt for the sophist, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Stranger first test drive their method by trying to define

---

<sup>12</sup> See Kahn 1996: 363–366 esp. p. 366; on the dialectician in the *Cratylus* cf. also *o.c.* pp. 306–307.

<sup>13</sup> It may be pointed out that the *Cratylus* contains a passage that sits ill with the *Sophist*. In *Crat.* 385b2–d1 it is argued that since a λόγος can be true or false, so can an ὄνομα since it is a minimal component of the former. In the *Sophist*, on the other hand, it is argued that truth and falsity belong to a λόγος, but not to its parts. Is this an argument against an ingressive interpretation of the *Cratylus*? One may well argue that, on the contrary, this passage actually lends support to such an interpretation. As already Schofield 1972 has pointed out, this passage does not belong where it now occurs. As the editors of the OCT note, against the suggestion by Schofield, this passage cannot be transposed to any other part of the text. Sedley 2003: 10–13 argues that Plato removed this section when he reworked the *Cratylus*, precisely since he wanted the *Cratylus* to fit with the *Sophist*. His suggestion is corroborated by the fact that the *Cratylus* also contains two versions of the same section (437d10–438a2 and 438a3–b4), another indication of a revision of the text.

the angler (*Soph.* 218d8–221c5). The angler is an expert as opposed to a non-expert. Experts can be divided in those who produce things and those who imitate things. The angler is a producer. From a further division of the activity of producing it appears that one form of producing is hunting. Hunting can be divided in the hunting of lifeless things and of living things. About the former type of hunting Socrates remarks: “it doesn’t have a name (ἀνώνυμον), except for some kinds of diving and other trivial things like that.”<sup>14</sup> The hunting of living things is next divided into land-hunting “which is divided into many types with many names” (πολλοῖς εἶδεσι καὶ ὀνόμασι διηρημένον), and aquatic hunting. Fishing comes under the latter heading. It is once again divided into two: on the one hand there something which “we shall call enclosure-hunting or something like that”. On the other hand there is something “which we should call by one word, strike-hunting”. Strike-hunting practiced by day, as opposed to at night, “is called hooking”. In some cases one strikes from above (in the case of spearing fish) in other cases from below. In these latter cases, the prey is drawn upward from underneath. The Eleatic Stranger continues:

**T. 1.7** And the part of hooking that involves a blow drawing a thing upward from underneath (τὴν κάτωθεν ἄνω πληγὴν ἀνασπασμένην) is called by a name that’s derived by its similarity to the action itself (ἀπ’ αὐτῆς τῆς πράξεως ἀφομοιωθὲν τοῦνομα), that is, it’s angling (ἀσπαλιευτική)—which is what we are searching for (*Soph.* 221b7–c3).

When we relate this discussion to the *Cratylus*, the close link between dialectical division and naming is evident. Whenever the Eleatic stranger makes a division, he also looks for appropriate names to label the two groups that he distinguishes. Sometimes existing Greek vocabulary will provide him with a fitting name, in other cases he has to make up names himself, as he does, e.g., in the case of ‘enclosure-hunting’.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as appears from **T. 1.7**, correctly established names bring out what is essential about a thing by means of resemblance.

When we next turn to the *Statesman* we find a young namesake of Socrates and the stranger from Elea trying to define the statesman by means of dialectical division. The statesman belongs to those people

<sup>14</sup> *Sophist.* 220a1–3; the translations of the *Sophist* are by White 1997.

<sup>15</sup> *Soph.* 220c7–8: Τοῦτο μὲν ἄρα ἐρκοθηρικὸν τῆς ἀγρας τὸ μέρος φήσομεν ἢ τι τοιοῦτον.

who possess knowledge as opposed to those who do not. This knowledge is theoretical instead of practical. Theoretical knowledge can be divided into theoretical knowledge that makes judgements and theoretical knowledge that directs, as does of course the political knowledge. It then appears that the statesman directs animated beings rather than unanimated ones, especially groups or herds of them rather than individuals, so that it is concluded—not quite correctly as will turn out later—that the politician is some kind of herdsman. In this process of division, the need to coin names by which to call various classes that have been distinguished makes itself felt for example in the case of the rearing of animated beings in herds:

**T. 1.8** Eleatic Stranger: “Well then: when it comes to rearing living creatures, are we to name (ὀνομάζωμεν) the shared rearing of many creatures together a sort of ‘herd-rearing’ (ἀγελαϊοτροφία) or ‘collective rearing’ (κοινοτροφική).”

Young Socrates: “Whichever turns out to fit, in the course of the argument.”

Eleatic Stranger: “Well said, Socrates; and if you persevere in not paying serious attention to names, you will be seen to be richer in wisdom as you advance to old age.” (*Pol.* 261e1–262a2).<sup>16</sup>

This passage recalls once again the lessons from the *Cratylus*. Dividing things up according to their nature, young Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger have discovered a certain class of beings. In order to distinguish this class from other classes of things, two names are suggested. These both contain a description of what is characteristic of this group and hence both meet the requirements of a correctly established name. Therefore, Socrates could not care less which one of the two they will use.<sup>17</sup> This recalls the passage from the *Cratylus* according to which any name that does what a name should do, i.e. teaching by diving up being in a natural manner, is a good name, regardless how it sounds. The advice to disregard names if one wishes to become wise, finally, recalls the end of the *Cratylus* according to which we should, in examining things, rather focus on the things themselves than on their names.

This illustration of correctly established names is followed by that of an incorrect name. Young Socrates continues by distinguishing the animated beings that live in herds into human beings and other

<sup>16</sup> Translations of the *Statesman* are after Rowe 1997.

<sup>17</sup> As opposed to sophists like Prodicus, whom Socrates briefly mentions in *Crat.* 384b3.

animals. The Eleatic Stranger points out to him that he is jumping to conclusions. He explains himself as follows:

**T. 1.9** Eleatic Stranger: “It is as if someone tried to divide the human race into two and made the cut in the way that most people carve things up, taking the Greek race away as one, separate from all the rest, and to all the other races together, which are unlimited in number, which do not mix with one another, and do not share the same language—calling this collection by the single appellation ‘barbarian’ (βάρβαρον μιᾷ κλήσει προσειπόντες). Because of this single appellation, they expect it to be a single family or class too” (*Polit.* 262c10–d6).<sup>18</sup>

What is wrong, clearly, is that in this case ordinary language does not divide the world in a way that corresponds to the nature of things: there is nothing that connects the class of barbarians apart from the fact that they do not speak Greek.

Interestingly, later on in the dialogue it appears that names like “herd-rearing”, no matter how careful they were established are wrong after all. As the Eleatic Stranger says, “we did not at all succeed in grasping the statesman along with the rest or name him for he eluded us in our naming, and we did not notice (ἡμᾶς ἔλαθεν κατὰ τὴν ὀνομασίαν ἐκφυγόν)”.<sup>19</sup> The Eleatic Stranger’s point is that whereas other herds-men may indeed rear their herds, the statesman does not, so if we wish to take the statesman and the other herds-men together into one class “we should have applied to all of them one of the names that belong in common to them”. Young Socrates agrees “if indeed there is such a name”. The Eleatic Stranger suggests to call it “looking after”, for that is “common to them all, without any specification of it as ‘rearing’, or any other sort of activity”. “By calling it some kind of expertise in ‘herd-keeping’ or ‘looking-after’, or ‘caring for’, as applying to them all”, they “could have covered the statesman too as well as the rest, given that this was the requirement our argument indicated.”<sup>20</sup> So, the understanding of the correctness of names is clearly an issue of importance in the art of dialectic. A future dialectician, even before he is taught “how to learn and make discoveries about the things”, which at that stage may be “too large a topic” for him,<sup>21</sup> should realize that

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Kretzmann 1971: 132 who calls attention to the fact that Plato applies his principles of correct naming from the *Cratylus* in other dialogues as well.

<sup>19</sup> *Polit.* 275d4–6.

<sup>20</sup> *Polit.* 275e4–9.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. **T. 1.6** above.

he cannot trust ordinary language, for it may fail to distinguish reality at its joints. If the need arises the dialectician will have to do the job himself.<sup>22</sup> In this respect, it could be added that Hermogenes makes a good candidate dialectician, for as Proclus and modern commentators point out, he has philosophical potential, even though at the time of the dialogue he lacks the philosophical skills required.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.2 The etymological section reconsidered: etymology and dialectic

A previous generation of scholars tended to sidestep this part of the dialogue. Whereas the first and last parts contain enough argumentation to arouse the interest of a philosophical reader, the etymological section that seems to go on forever shows us a Socrates, who, in the grip of some kind of divine inspiration, produces one wild etymology after another without much of an argument to it. Yet, what was offensive to an older generation, was exactly what piqued the curiosity of a younger one. As T. M. S. Baxter put it in his study of the *Cratylus* that inaugurated an upsurge of interest in this part of the dialogue: “to do the *Cratylus* justice one must do the etymologies justice”.<sup>24</sup> Even though recent students of the dialogue agree that no interpretation of the *Cratylus* is complete without a discussion of the etymological section, they disagree about what to make from it.

First, they are divided over the question whether the etymologies are a kind of joke or not. Baxter is of the former view. He assumes that we should read the etymological section as a parody that attacks a strong tendency in Greek thought to overvalue words. He explains the length of the section from the fact that there was so much to parody and does a very useful job in identifying various individuals and groups at which Plato takes aim.<sup>25</sup> Among these are people who practice allegorical exegesis of ancient religious texts such as Homer, Hesiod, and the author of the famous Derveni-papyrus who are targeted at the beginning of the etymological section. Apparently, there were people around at the time who tried to bring these ancient venerated texts

---

<sup>22</sup> I do not believe, *pace* Baxter 1992: 31–85, that Plato is speculating about a complete ideal *language* that covers all things as a goal in itself. Rather, the *Cratylus* explains how a dialectician in action should use language. In such a context, the formation of new words happens in a piecemeal fashion.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* XXXII p. 11, 12–4, Baxter 1992: 17–18.

<sup>24</sup> Baxter 1992: 2.

<sup>25</sup> See especially Baxter 1992: 107–163 (“Etymologies and Etymologists”).



into line with the new developments in philosophy. In these allegories etymology played an important role. As is well known, Plato shows himself very hostile towards allegory. One just has to think of his attack on ὑπονοία as a way to save the blasphemous tales from Homer and Hesiod in *Republic* II or of his remark at the beginning of the *Phaedrus* that he is happy to leave the task of interpretation such stories to others, for there is no end to it, whereas he lacks the time to do so.<sup>26</sup> To my mind, Baxter is certainly right in assuming that the *Cratylus* contains an attack on people like the author of the Derveni-papyrus and below we shall come back to this aspect of the *Cratylus*.<sup>27</sup> However, the issue now is whether Baxter is right that the etymologies from the *Cratylus* are mere parodies.

Recently, R. Barney and D. Sedley have rejected this interpretation of the etymological section by calling attention to the fact, already observed by G. Grote, that later ancient writers cite the etymologies with respect and attribute them to Plato himself.<sup>28</sup> Barney goes on to argue that the etymologies in the *Cratylus* are actually quite clever ones, at least according to ancient standards. She ingeniously argues that Plato, in order to criticize the etymological method more effectively later on, first shows himself to be a competent etymologist. The length of the passage is explained from this agonistic nature: Plato's mastery of the naming game appears not just from the ingenuity of his etymologies but also from the enormous bulk of them which he manages to produce.<sup>29</sup>

Sedley agrees with Barney about the high quality of the etymologies, yet he holds a rather subtle view about Plato's appreciation of the etymological method. He distinguishes between two types of correctness of etymologies. Socrates in the *Cratylus* assumes that successful etymology reveals the beliefs of the first name-givers. Sedley calls this the *exegetical correctness* of etymologies and argues that the etymologies of the *Cratylus* are supposed to be correct in this way. Yet—as Socrates himself points out—it is by no means certain that the beliefs of these name-givers were correct, so the *philosophical correctness* of the etymologies is an altogether

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Plato *R.* 378b8–e4, discussed by Baxter 1992: 117–119; *Phdr.* 229c6–230a7.

<sup>27</sup> See pp. 178–179.

<sup>28</sup> Grote vol. II: 516–529; cf. Barney 2001: 70; Sedley 2003: 39–40.

<sup>29</sup> Barney 2001: 60–73 of which Barney 1998 is an earlier version.

different matter.<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, there seems to be a clear cut in the etymological section: Socrates explicitly warns his public that the second set of etymologies will be philosophical incorrect due to the condition of the first name-givers (see **T. 1.3** above), whereas the first set of etymologies that includes the exegesis of divine names appears to contain much that is in line with Plato's own philosophy. According to Sedley the latter demonstrate that Plato credited his distant forerunners with an impressive grasp of the divine, even though they fell short in their understanding of other aspects of reality.<sup>31</sup>

Let us briefly consider why the name-givers of old did not get the names of the non-divine entities right. According to **T. 1.3** they got dizzy going around and around in their search for the nature of the things to the result that they assumed that everything is in flux and nothing is stable. This explains why they fared much better in naming eternal things that are by their very nature stable.<sup>32</sup> However, the assumption that according to these ancient name-givers everything is constantly changing also implies that they were not dialecticians. For in his discussion with Hermogenes, Socrates, after having refuted the views of Protagoras and Euthydemus, concludes that things have a stable essence (**T. 1.1**). This assumption is a necessary condition for dialectic. We can only divide up reality in a natural way if things have separate natures of their own. In a world of Heracleitian flux, as Socrates stresses in his discussion with Cratylus, everything is fluid. Hence it becomes impossible to divide up things in a natural way. This in turn implies that the names in ordinary language are bound to be incorrect. Correct naming takes after all a dialectician to supervise it.

The implicit suggestion in the *Cratylus* that ancient man did not do dialectic finds a fuller expression in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*. In the myth of the *Statesman* the Eleatic stranger expresses his doubts whether

---

<sup>30</sup> See Sedley 2003: 28–30; for Socrates' thesis that the ancient name-givers need not necessarily have understood the nature of things correctly, cf. **T. 1.3** and **T. 1.5**.

<sup>31</sup> Sedley 2003: 89–98.

<sup>32</sup> Particularly relevant here is *Crat.* 396b–c where Socrates explains the name of Cronus from the fact that he has a pure (*koros*) intellect (*nous*) since the contemplation of Uranus (i.e. both the father of Cronus and the Heaven) produces purity of intellect, as the *meteorologoi* claim. This etymology anticipates passages in the Platonic corpus (e.g. in the *Republic* and *Timaeus*) which celebrate astronomy as a privileged route to the perfection of one's intellect (cf. Sedley 2003: 91), for this study of the harmonious movements of the heavens brings harmony to the human soul that was unsettled because of its fall into the realm of becoming.

primitive man, living in some kind of Hesiodic Golden Age, was keen for knowledge and the cultivation of reason.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, instead of filling their abundant spare time with philosophical discussion, they spent their time eating, drinking, and telling stories. At the end of the *Sophist*, we find an even more straightforward passage. The Eleatic visitor has just distinguished two types of imitators. He then continues by observing that we lack names to distinguish the two:

**T. 1.10** Where would you get a suitable name (ὄνομα πρέπον) for each of them? Isn't it obviously hard to, just because the people who came before us were thoughtless and lazy about dividing kinds into types, and so they never even tried to divide them. That's why we necessarily lack a good supply of names. Still, even though it sounds daring let's distinguish them by calling imitation accompanied by belief "belief-mimicry" and imitation accompanied by knowledge "informed mimicry" (*Sophist* 267d4–e3; trans. White).

What, then, are we to make from the etymological passage? Etymology reveals that naming depends on the views that the name-giver holds about the world. Unfortunately, it turns out that the name-givers of old failed to develop a correct understanding of the things that they set out to name because they did not do dialectic. This makes philosophizing by etymology a dangerous affair.

Yet, it would be wrong to read the *Cratylus* as merely a warning against etymologizing as a way of examining the world. Something more fundamental is at stake here. If the only short-coming of the ancient name-givers had been that they had just failed to gain a correct understanding of the essence of a thing, no much harm would have been done. All a philosopher would have to do, would be just to disregard the etymology of a name and investigate afresh the nature of the thing itself. However, from a Platonic perspective things are more problematic. The reason why the ancient name-givers went wrong was that they were not working under the supervision of dialecticians, as they ought to have been. As a result they not just failed to grasp the particular characteristic of each thing, but also to divide up reality in the appropriate way. The Platonic dialectician, whose job is to divide up reality, should thus be aware that the way in which language divides the world might well be incorrect (cf., e.g., **T. 1.9** and **T. 1.10**). In other words, language, by means of which we conduct our dialectical

---

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Plato *Pol.* 272b–d, discussed by Boys-Stones 2001: 10–11.

discussions, may well be unfit for dialectical purposes. These considerations also explain the extraordinary length of the etymological session. Plato wants to show that the *rot* is everywhere. The Greek language in its entirety has been crafted by believers in the flux doctrine and hence clearly not according to the instructions of dialecticians. The Greek language is in a mess.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.3 Conventional correctness vs. natural correctness: two types of language

As we have seen in our perusal of Socrates' discussion with Cratylus, Socrates, somewhat surprisingly after his discussion with Hermogenes, claims that convention too plays a role in the correctness of names (cf. **T. 1.4**), thus leaving many modern commentators wondering what to make of Plato's definitive position on the correctness of names. J. Ackrill (1994) has offered a very helpful suggestion to solve this paradox. He assumes that in the *Cratylus* we should distinguish between two types of discourse: ordinary language and the language used by the Platonic dialectician. "In ordinary language people use language to talk about ordinary things. In the philosophical discourse that Plato calls dialectic philosophers use language to talk about meanings or concepts (or indeed, taking the point further, about Forms)."<sup>35</sup> To put it differently, in daily life we use language to say such things as "the cat is on the mat". The dialectician does not ask and answer such questions as "where is the cat" or "is the cat on the mat?". He asks after definitions: "what is a cat?"<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, in the case of a dialectical use of language it is important that naming follows nature, i.e. that names are correct by nature. In the case of the everyday use of language for communication no such natural correctness is required. It suffices that we know what another means by a word and here the only thing that matters is that we use language according to shared conventions. As long as we know what someone is thinking of when he says 'σκληρότης', we are able to communicate with each other, even though the 'l'-sound

---

<sup>34</sup> It may be objected that Socrates seems to undermine the exegetical correctness of the etymologies in *Crat.* 437a–c when he redoes some etymologies in such a way that it seems that according to the ancient name-givers rest, rather than flux, lies at the heart of things. Yet in *Crat.* 439c3–4 Socrates once again expresses his belief in the exegetical correctness of the flux etymologies.

<sup>35</sup> Ackrill 1994: 28.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Ackrill 1994: 21.

imitates softness. As we shall see, this distinction between everyday, conventional language and naturally correct, dialectical language will play an important role in Proclus' discussion of the *Cratylus*.<sup>37</sup>

Plato's interest in ordinary language as a means of communication is only limited, and Socrates thus steers the discussion back into the direction of dialectical language by asking Cratylus what he thinks that is the good of names. Cratylus responds that the good of them is that they instruct (διδάσκειν), because "anyone who knows a thing's name also knows the thing" (*Crat.* 435d). Thus we are back at the definition of names as instruments of instruction that Socrates had previously suggested to Hermogenes.

In his response to Cratylus, Socrates appears to be an *etymological pessimist*, but an *epistemological optimist*. That is to say, on the one hand he casts the reliability of etymology as an instrument for philosophical investigation into doubt. Etymology at best presents us with the opinions of the name-givers and we have no guarantee whatsoever that these are true. On the other hand, he thinks that it is possible to learn about the things through the things themselves. It will thus be curious to find that most Platonists who read the *Cratylus* are etymological optimists but epistemological pessimists. They doubt our capacity to study the things through themselves, but are at the same time quite confident that we may investigate them through etymology.

Socrates' doubts at the very end of the dialogue about the validity of the flux-theory which informs most names has often been assumed to be a, admittedly not very good, argument for the existence of Forms. It is supposed to go something like this:<sup>38</sup>

Sensible things are always in extreme flux.

Knowledge is possible.

No knowledge of things in extreme flux is possible.

Hence the existence of knowledge requires the existence of unchanging objects of knowledge, the Forms.

My main problem with this reading is that this argument comes somewhat out of the blue at the end of the dialogue. Why would Socrates all of a sudden feel the need to produce such an argument? Rather it brings home the consequences for dialectic of the analysis of language

<sup>37</sup> See pp. 89–91.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Baxter 1992: 176–183 for a discussion of this interpretation and the responses to it.

in the discussion with Hermogenes and of the etymological section. In the etymological section we found that existing language is based on the assumption that everything is in a state of flux. As **T. 1.3** (cf. also *Crat.* 439c) indicates, this is because of the way in which the first name-givers perceived the world. Since, on this view, it is impossible to have knowledge of the things themselves, these have to be ill given names. After all, naming correctly depends on knowledge of the world and we can only have knowledge of unchanging things. This is not some new point that Socrates surprisingly conjures up. At the very beginning of the dialogue he had argued that the correctness of names is natural instead of conventional precisely because “things have some stable essence of their own” (see **T. 1.1** above). Cratylus, by wholeheartedly accepting Socrates’ account of the natural correctness of names, had also unwittingly committed himself to this ontological claim. If, as appears from the etymological section, most, if not all, names appear to deny that things have such stable essences, it follows that these names are incorrect by nature. Cratylus, it will be remembered, had claimed that when one uses incorrect names, one is just making noise but not saying anything at all. The very fact that he has just had a meaningful conversation with Socrates by means of incorrect names proves him wrong. The reason for this is that convention sees to it that we understand each other all the same. However, even if incorrect names may still be effective tools for communication, they are unsuited for the dialectical investigation of the essences of things. And that is to my mind the crucial point that the *Cratylus* wishes to raise.

### 3.4 Concluding remarks

Let me briefly summarize the points about the *Cratylus* that I have made above and that will be of importance for the study of its ancient reception:

1. The *Cratylus* is a dialogue about names as dialectical instruments.
2. Dialectic is about knowledge and hence about stable essences, i.e. the Platonic Forms, hence names as dialectical instruments refer to Platonic Forms. Elsewhere Plato often stresses, e.g. in *Parm.* 130e5–131a2—a texts which, as we shall see, will arouse the interest of Proclus—, *Phd.* 102b, and *R.* 596a, that names belong primarily to the Forms, only secondarily to their participants in the sensible realm.
3. These names, if given correctly, divide Being along natural lines into natural parts.

4. These names are also supposed to bring out what is characteristic of each part thus distinguished.
5. As such these names ought to be the product of dialectical procedures which divide up being in search of the characteristics of its natural parts.
6. This implies that correct naming can only be undertaken by those very few trained in dialectic or those working under the guidance of a dialectician.
7. Unfortunately, the study of etymology reveals that existing language is not the product of dialectical considerations, but reflects a Heraclitian worldview based on the perception of the material world.
8. As a result etymologies are likely to be philosophically incorrect and hence unreliable sources of knowledge about the things themselves.
9. Moreover the dialectician is well advised to mistrust the way in which language divides the world.
10. Thus ordinary language is an imperfect tool for the dialectician.

#### 4. *Aristotle on names: De Interpretatione*

Let us now turn to Aristotle, who begins *De Interpretatione* by defining what according to him an ὄνομα is:

**T. 1.11** Now spoken sounds are symbols of affections in the soul and written marks symbols of spoken sounds. And just as written marks are not the same for all men, neither are spoken sounds. But what these are in the first place signs of—affections of the soul—are the same for all. And what these affections are likenesses of—actual things—are also the same. These matters have been discussed in the work on the soul and do not belong to the present subject. (*De Inter.* 16a3–9; trans. Ackrill 1963: 43).

In Aristotle's semantic model we have thus four elements: (1) the actual things (πράγματα) that are the same for all; these are somehow responsible for (2) 'affections of the soul' (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθήματα) which, being likenesses (ὁμοιώματα) of former, are also the same all. These affections may be expressed in (3) spoken sounds, which are (conventional) symbols (σύμβολα) of these affections and are not the same for all. These spoken sounds finally may be expressed in writing, which, just like spoken sound is not the same for all.

This tiny passage has provoked a lot of discussion in scholarly literature. Especially the nature of the ‘affections of the soul’ has been fiercely debated. Nowadays it is generally assumed that these are thoughts.<sup>39</sup> Aristotle himself hints in this direction, for he continues after the present passage with some remarks about truth conditions in which he claims that the situation for thoughts (*De Inter.* 16a10: νοήματα) is comparable to that for names. Aristotle’s somewhat surprising claim that these thoughts are the same for all is best understood against the background of his psychology as discussed in *De Anima* III. Put briefly, Aristotle assumes that thinking functions analogously to sense perception. In the case of sense perception, on Aristotle’s theory at least, the object of sense acts upon the sentient subject so that the subject becomes like the object by taking over its form without its matter.<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the mind is acted upon by the object of thought (πάσχειν τι ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ, cf. the ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθήματα) in such a way that the form of the object of thought is taken on by the mind.<sup>41</sup>

Now we come to the ὀνόματα, defined by Aristotle as spoken sounds, σύμβολα of the aforementioned affections. The use of the term σύμβολα already implies what Aristotle will later on say in so many words, i.e. that names are a product of convention. A σύμβολον was one of the two parts of an object, for example a bone, broken into two as part of an agreement. Any object as such might do. Both parties kept a piece and could thus identify people as belonging to the other party by joining the two bits together. The object that functions as a σύμβολον by itself does not mean anything. It is meaningful because two parties have previously agreed about the meaning of it, say, “pay this person a hundred drachmas”, or, in another case, “please give this man a bed for the night and a meal”.

What is Aristotle’s reason for claiming that names are a matter of convention? It is sometimes assumed that this reason is supplied by the remark that names are not the same for all. This was already a well-tryed argument by the time of Aristotle in favor of the thesis that language is conventional. As we have seen, Hermogenes in the *Cratylus*

<sup>39</sup> For this interpretation, see, e.g., Polansky and Kuczewski 1990; Charles 1994: 41–43 and Charles 2000: 81–83; Weidemann 1994: 141; Whitaker 1996: 13–17.

<sup>40</sup> See, e.g., *De An.* II 5, 418a3–6.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., *De An.* III 4, 429a13–18 and 430a3–4.



was arguing along those lines, while Proclus in his *Commentary on the Cratylus* ascribes this argument to Democritus.<sup>42</sup> However, even though it may be that Aristotle thought that the diversity of language was an argument against it being by nature, he does not present it as such. Moreover, when he next discusses his definition of ὄνομα as “a spoken sound significant by convention, without time, none of whose parts is significant in separation”,<sup>43</sup> he gives another reason:

**T. 1.12** I say ‘by convention’ because no name is a name naturally but only when it has become a symbol. For (ἐπεὶ) even inarticulate noises (of beasts, for instance) do indeed reveal something, yet none of them is a name (Aristotle *Int.* 16a26–29; trans. Ackrill adapted).

I take it that Aristotle’s point is simply that even though animal sounds reveal something, no-one would call these ὀνόματα. What makes a name a name is thus not the fact that it is a means of communication. So are after all spontaneous animal cries. What distinguishes names from spontaneous significant cries is convention. Take a natural cry by which primitive man indicates that something is the matter. It has only become a proper name when it has become a symbol, i.e. when we have agreed that we signify this particular thing by means of this particular sound.<sup>44</sup>

Here, Aristotle appears to be in agreement with Plato. For as we have seen above, the *Cratylus* implies that to the extent that language is a means of communication, its correctness is a matter of convention. However, one remark by Aristotle does suggest criticism of Plato. When he comes to talk about the definition of a λόγος (statement), he says:

**T. 1.13** Every statement is significant (not as a tool but, as we said by convention), but not every sentence is a statement-making sentence, but only those in which there is truth or falsity (Aristotle *Int.* 16b33–17a3; trans. Ackrill).

<sup>42</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* XVI p. 6, 23–25 discussed at pp. 104–106 below. Ackrill 1963: 114, interestingly, uses Plato’s *Cratylus* to argue against this argument.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle *Int.* 16a19–21 (trans. Ackrill).

<sup>44</sup> Aristotle thus appears to be a forerunner of Epicurus, who famously holds that language initially arose naturally, since primitive man naturally emitted certain sounds when it perceived the various things, whereas in a second phase “particular coining were made by consensus within the individual races, so as to make the designations less ambiguous and more concisely expressed” (Cf. Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 75–76; trans. Long & Sedley 19a).

The denial that a statement is significant as a tool (ὄργανον) prompts one to wonder whether this is meant as a rejection of the statement in the *Cratylus* that names are tools. This question has often been answered in the affirmative.<sup>45</sup> If so, this passage would constitute the first reaction on the *Cratylus*. Let us therefore see how likely it is that Aristotle here has the *Cratylus* in mind.

First, does it matter that Plato was talking about ὀνόματα and not about λόγοι? Not per se. The addition “as we said” refers us back to something said earlier, which can only be, I think, **T. 1.12**. Thus Aristotle assumes that what holds true for an ὄνομα holds equally true for a λόγος. This is only to be expected, because a λόγος consists of ὀνόματα and verbs, which are themselves some sort of ὀνόματα.<sup>46</sup> Aristotle in *De Sensu* puts it somewhat more explicitly:

**T. 1.14**... while hearing announces only the distinctive qualities of sound, and to some few animals, those also of voice.<sup>47</sup> Incidentally, however, it is hearing that contributes most to the growth of intelligence. For λόγος is a cause of instruction in virtue of being audible, which it is, not in its own right, but incidentally; since it is composed of words and each word is a σύμβολον (Aristotle *De Sensu* 437a9–16; trans. Beare)

A more serious problem for this line of interpretation is that Plato and Aristotle are talking about two different things. Aristotle claims that both the meaning of a name and that of a λόγος are matters of convention. When Plato in the *Cratylus* talks about names as tools he claims that their *correctness* as dialectical tools depends on the nature of things, not that they are significant because they are tools. In fact, as we have seen (§ 3.3), Plato himself had already called attention to the fact that the communicative force of names depends, at least in part, on convention.

What, then, is the point that Aristotle wishes to make? Aristotle does not deny that a λόγος is a tool of communication, what he denies is

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Ackrill 1963: 124; Montanari 1988: 305–312; Weideman 1994: 190–191; Whitaker 1996: 12; Modrak 2001: 52 n. 1; for the opposite view that Plato and Aristotle actually concur with each other, see Guthrie 1978: 20 n. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 16b19–20: “when uttered just by itself a verb is a name and signifies something”.

<sup>47</sup> The same distinction between mere sound (ψόφος) and articulated voice is implied in **T. 1.12** where Aristotle refers to “the inarticulate noises of animals” (οἱ ἀγράμματοι ψόφοι).

that because a λόγος is a tool of communication, it is meaningful.<sup>48</sup> A λόγος is meaningful because it consists of names which in turn are meaningful because they are conventional symbols.

In conclusion it can be said that the remarks about the nature of language in *De Interpretatione* are quite unconnected to the discussion in the *Cratylus* and can not be interpreted as a reaction against them.<sup>49</sup> No-where does Aristotle pronounce himself on the question of correctness of names, the central issue of the *Cratylus*. Apparently, the issue did not interest him. All the same Proclus, as we shall see, was convinced that Aristotle is here taking aim at the *Cratylus* and will stand up for the dialogue against Aristotle in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*.

### 5. Aristotle on language and philosophy

Now that we have seen what according to Aristotle a name is, let us look what role he assigns to names in philosophical discourse. To some extent Aristotle ascribes the same function to language in general and names in a particular as Plato did. Like Plato, Aristotle assumes that we use language for didactic purposes (**T. 1.14**), because they divide the world in natural kinds. However, contrary to Plato, Aristotle does not mistrust ordinary language. In fact, he assumes that ordinary language is very informative about reality. Famously, he often starts his examination of a philosophical question from the way in which we use a certain name in ordinary language.<sup>50</sup> Aristotle trusts ordinary language because he trusts that sense perception provides us with reliable information about reality. Plato imagines (**T. 1.3**) that the name-givers of old got dizzy from investigating the nature of the ever-changing sensible universe and thus ended up having confused ideas about the true, unchanging nature of things. Aristotle, on the other hand, is confident that sense perception allows us to acquire correct universal concepts. These are the affections of the soul that are “the same for all” (**T. 1.11**) to which

<sup>48</sup> Cf., e.g., Montanari 1988: 312—who assumes that Aristotle is attacking the *Cratylus*—for the point that Aristotle does not deny that a λόγος an instrument.

<sup>49</sup> Rather than a response to the *Cratylus*, the first chapters of *De Interpretatione* are inspired by Plato’s discussion in *Soph.* 261–263 of simple statements.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g., *EN* 1129a31–b1 where he begins his investigation of what ‘being unjust’ means by analyzing the various senses in which a man is said to be unjust; cf. his discussion of μεγαλονυχία in the same treatise, and that of change and coming-to-be in *GC* (**T. 1.16**), which are both discussed in this paragraph.

names refer.<sup>51</sup> Therefore, names may constitute a good starting point for philosophical investigations. In this context, Aristotle's discussion of various types of definition in *APo* II 10 is relevant:

**T. 1.15** Since a definition is said to be an account given in reply to the 'What is —?' question, it is clear that one kind of definition will be an account given in reply to the question 'What is it that a name or name-like expression signifies?' (τί σημαίνει τὸ ὄνομα ἢ λόγος ἕτερος ὀνοματώδης) An example of such question is 'What is it that "triangle" signifies?' When we grasp that what (it is that) is signified exists, we seek to answer the 'Why?' question. It is difficult to understand in this way (*viz.* through gaining an answer to the 'Why?' question) things which we do not know to exist (*APo* II 10, 93b29–35; trans. Charles 1994: 38).

D. Charles understands these different types of definition as three stages in a process of scientific investigation:<sup>52</sup>

- Stage 1: One grasps an account of what a name or a name-like expression signifies.
- Stage 2: One grasps that what is signified by a name or a name-like expression exists.
- Stage 3: One grasps the essence of the object/kind signified by a name or name-like expressions.

Thus, the study of names does not, according to Aristotle, teach you what exactly a thing is (i.e. stage 3), not even that it exists (stage 2). The meaning of a name provides one with some kind of a preliminary and partial definition of a thing from which one may start the search for the definite and essential definition of that thing. Aristotle thus clearly

---

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., the famous discussion in *APo*. II 19 and the remarks about sense perception in § 4 above. The issue is well discussed by, e.g., Modrak 2001: 51: "The impact of the world on us through our senses and intellect produces the concepts that provide the foundations of knowledge and language, for empirically produced concepts not only are the basis of science, they also serve as the intentional content of the internal states that words symbolize. When one acquires a natural language, one acquires a classification scheme that is embodied in these internal states and expresses their contents. The concepts of natural language are roughly isomorphic with the things that are; scientific concepts are isomorphic with the things that are. Since these objects have stability, senses of words are stable and, for general terms, reference is fixed by sense, so that human beings equipped with a language are able to refer to and describe real objects"; Modrak 2001: 108–114 elaborates on this.

<sup>52</sup> Charles 1994: 38–41.

distinguishes between a nominal account (stage 1)<sup>53</sup> and an essential account (stage 2). In doing so, he differs from Plato. The latter had postulated that correctly established names express the nature of their objects. Thus according to him, the true meaning of names is not some sort of concept that we happen to have, but the very essence of its bearer.<sup>54</sup> About Aristotle's nominal account Charles observes:

This type of account need not involve any reflection on what holds the relevant kind together, or indeed on whether the kind has an essence at all. It could be grasped by one who thought that this term marked out an objective kind ('cut the world at its joints'), but had no views about whether (for example) kinds have essences or underlying structures. Its role is rather to hold up a kind for further scientific enquiry into its nature. Such introductory accounts play an important role in enquiry but need not themselves give materials uniquely to identify the relevant kind.<sup>55</sup>

So, contrary to Plato, Aristotle assumes that the way in which language divides the world is likely to be correct. Philosophers who divide the world in a way different from the division implied by names face an uphill struggle when they wish to convince Aristotle. Take, for example, Aristotle's remarks at the beginning of *De Generatione and Corruptione*. Aristotle sets himself the task to distinguish the causes and definitions of coming-to-be and passing away and to investigate:

**T. 1.16** whether we are to suppose that the nature of alteration (ἀλλοίωσις) and coming-to-be (γένεσις) is the same, or whether each is of a separate nature corresponding to the names by which they are distinguished (ὥσπερ διώρισται καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασιν). Of the ancient philosophers some assert that what is called 'simple' (ἀπλῆν) coming-to-be is alteration while others hold that alteration and coming to be are different processes. Those who hold that the universe is a simple entity and who generate all things from a single thing, must necessarily maintain that coming-to-be is alteration, and that what comes-to-be in the proper sense of the term (τὸ κυρίως γινόμενον) undergoes alteration (Aristotle *GC* 314a4–11; trans. Forster).

Plato would have no trouble whatsoever to claim that names as they are used in ordinary Greek do not distinguish reality correctly and that

<sup>53</sup> As De Rijk 2002: 691–692 observes, all commentators, both ancient and modern, interpret the first definition as a nominal definition.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Baxter 1992: 72–80 who observes that Socrates in the *Cratylus* does not distinguish between nominal definitions (i.e. the meaning of words) and real definition (i.e. definitions that bring out the essence of things); cf. also Ackrill 1994.

<sup>55</sup> Charles 1994: 62.

the proper sense of a name is altogether different from the one that it has in everyday language. Aristotle, on the other hand, is suspicious of the theory of some Presocratics that coming to be in the proper sense is just change, precisely because it contradicts ordinary language. So suspicious, in fact, that he does not think it necessary to refute this claim, but instead focuses on the rivalling view according to which alteration and coming-to-be are two different things since almost all philosophers think so.<sup>56</sup> In keeping with this, Aristotle also takes a more positive view of etymology. Like Plato, Aristotle assumes that etymology reveals the opinions of the ancient name-givers. These need not necessarily be correct, but they may well be.<sup>57</sup> In *EN* 1123a34–35, for example, he starts his examination of μεγαλοψυχία by analysing the name of this virtue. The name reveals that it is about ‘great things’ (περὶ μέγала μὲν καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἔοικεν εἶναι). The question now is: what great things (περὶ ποῖα δ’ ἐστὶ πρῶτον λάβωμεν)? Note how Aristotle moves from the first stage of definition (to grasp the significance of a name) to the third stage (to grasp the essence of the thing signified by that name). In *EN* 1140b11–12 Aristotle cites the etymology of σωφροσύνη (moderation) in order to corroborate his analysis of it. He assumes that the name σωφροσύνη refers to the fact that moderation saves wisdom (ἔνθεν καὶ τὴν σωφροσύνην τούτῳ προσαγορεύομεν τῷ ὀνόματι, ὡς σφύζουσιν τὴν φρόνησιν). Interestingly, Plato offers the same etymology in *Crat.* 411e4f. However, Plato produces all those etymologies in order to throw the etymological procedure into doubt, not as an aid to grasp the nature of things.

The statement that according to Aristotle names represent reality fairly correctly needs qualification, though. In *De Generatione et Corruptione*, for example, Aristotle appears critical about the way in which the *hoi polloi* use the terms ‘becoming’ (γίνεσθαι) and ‘perishing’ (φθείρεσθαι).<sup>58</sup> They distinguish (διαφέρειν) between becoming and perishing on the basis of perception. When something changes into perceptible matter, they call it ‘becoming’ (γίνεσθαί φασιν), when it changes into something unperceivable, they call it ‘perishing’. The reason for this is that their criterion for distinguishing being from not-being is whether a thing is perceived or not. According to Aristotle, the equation of being with

<sup>56</sup> Aristotle *GC* 315b16.

<sup>57</sup> As Sedley 2003: 31 points out.

<sup>58</sup> *GC* 18b 18–33. The interpretation of this passage that now follows above is that of Rashed 2005: lxx–lxxiv.

being perceptible is wrong. Thus, Aristotle here seems to agree with Plato that name-givers may have got it wrong because they focused on the sensible realm. There is an important difference though: Aristotle may deny that the ordinary usage of the terms of becoming and perishing is entirely correct, still he believes that it points to the truth of the matter all the same (τρόπον τινὰ διώκοντες τᾷ ἀληθείᾳ, αὐτὸ δὲ λέγοντες οὐκ ἀληθές). It reveals that people instinctively understand that becoming is a development from not-being towards being, even though they fail to understand exactly the nature of both being and non-being.<sup>59</sup> Neither does Aristotle think that names necessarily offer us an exhaustive division of reality. Once a philosopher starts analysing reality, he may discover that some things are without names. In those cases, a philosopher may have to coin an appropriate name himself. To give just one example: Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* famously holds that every virtue is a mean in between a vice of deficiency and a vice of excess. However, many virtues and vices appear to be without names. There is, for example, no name for those people who have a defective response to pleasure, since there are only few of them. Aristotle thus proposes to call them the ‘insensible’, a name that fits this unfortunate group of people well.<sup>60</sup>

#### 6. *Conclusive remark: Plato, Aristotle and the issue of the correctness of names*

As we have already noted, Aristotle did not discuss the topic of the correctness of names. By now it may be clear why Plato devoted a whole dialogue to the topic, whereas Aristotle remains silent about it. To Plato the correctness of names is an issue since a Platonic dialectician uses names to discuss the structure of what he perceives to be reality, i.e. the realm of the intelligible Forms. Since the name-givers of old apparently did not look at the intelligible realm but at the sensible realm, the names that the dialectician has at his disposal do not necessarily fit intelligible

<sup>59</sup> Cf. the apt summary of this passage by Rashed 2005: 117 additional n. 1 to p. 17: “Troisième intuition, qui est celle de la langue naturelle non rectifiée par la philosophie. Même si le vulgaire se trompe en assignant le perceptible à l’être, le non-perceptible au non-être, il est dans le vrai en orientant instinctivement le devenir du non-être vers l’être. C’est ce dernier point qui importe à Ar.”

<sup>60</sup> *EN* 1107b2: πολλὰ δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνόνομα; *EN* 1107b7–9: ἐλλείποντες δὲ περὶ τὰς ἡδονὰς οὐ πάνυ γίνονται· διόπερ οὐδ’ ὀνόματος τετυγῆκασιν οὐδ’ οἱ τοιοῦτοι, ἔστωσαν δὲ ἀναίσθητοι.

reality. When they fail to do so, names are incorrect, which is to say that they are unsuited for the purpose of Platonic dialectic. They may well be suited for everyday communication, but that is not something that a philosopher when philosophizing is interested in. Aristotle does not postulate an intelligible realm. Philosophy, in one way or another, starts with the individual in the sensible realm. Thus, there exists no fundamental difference between the objects of (ordinary) language and those of philosophy. Hence the Platonic problem of the correctness of names does not occur.





## CHAPTER TWO

### THE MIDDLE PLATONISTS: CONSTRUCTING PLATONIC DOCTRINES

#### 1. *Introduction*

About the Old Academy we know little, about its interest in the *Cratylus* even less. In this chapter, I shall therefore move straight to the Middle Platonists, be it with an occasional glance backwards to Plato's immediate heirs such as Speusippus and Xenocrates. Middle Platonism, it is well-known, started off as a reaction against the scepticism of the New Academy in the first century BCE. The never-ending search for knowledge by casting doubt over everything was replaced by attempts to construct a systematic account of Plato's philosophy on a par with the systems of the popular Hellenistic schools such as the Stoa and Epicurism. One of the major problems with these attempts was, of course, that Plato's dialogues seem to be designed precisely to refute such attempts, as the still on-going debate about the correct interpretation of the *Cratylus* may remind us.<sup>1</sup> The Middle Platonists looked to the Peripatetics and Stoics for inspiration. Aristotle and the Stoics, by their own admittance, had drawn on Plato's philosophy. Later Platonists argued that the doctrines of these schools could thus at least in part be seen as expositions of Plato's views, be it in a far more systematic way. This is not to say that they thought that the Stoics and Aristotle were full-blooded Platonists. In fact, many Platonists showed themselves quite critical of various aspects of Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy. All the same, Platonists started to import elements as well as terminology from other philosophical schools in their expositions of Plato's philosophy in the belief that these elements were part of the Platonic tradition.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the perceptive remark by the author of *Ep.* VII 341d–e that Plato did not produce a systematic account of his philosophy because this would be impossible.

<sup>2</sup> I derive this account of the way in which Middle Platonists understood and used Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy from Karamanolis 2006, esp. pp. 1–43. This kind of Platonism is sometimes called 'eclectic'. I will refrain from using this label here since the term is extremely ambiguous (cf. Donini 1988: 32: "[t]he history of the discussion seems to produce an exhortation to employ the term sparingly"). On the idea

In the case of the *Cratylus*, for instance, we shall find in this chapter that Platonists bring the Aristotelian theory of names as symbols and the Stoic theory of etymology to bear on the *Cratylus* in order to construct a clear-cut doctrine concerning names, their relation to the *nominata*, and their function in philosophical inquiries. The importance of the Middle Platonists for the history of Platonism in general and for the interpretation of the *Cratylus* in particular should not be underrated. The Neoplatonists, who too assume that Plato was a doctrinal philosopher, will make critical use of the work of the Middle Platonists in their commentaries. Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* provides a good illustration in point, both in the sense that it takes over some elements from the Middle Platonic interpretations, such as the interpretation of the etymological section of the *Cratylus* in terms of Stoic etymological theory, and that it reacts against others, for example against the incorporation of Aristotle's semantic theory into Platonism.

Where, then, do we have to look for Middle Platonic discussions of the *Cratylus*? Evidence is scarce and scattered, for we have no Middle Platonic equivalent to Proclus' *Commentary*.<sup>3</sup> This has probably less to do with the capricious fortunes of textual transmission and more with the way in which the Middle Platonists approached the Platonic corpus, which they plundered in their search for building blocks for their systematic accounts of the master's doctrines. It was not until the second half of the second century CE that Platonists, following the example set by the Peripatos, fully embraced the commentary as the principle medium for the expression of philosophical ideas.<sup>4</sup>

Because Hellenistic theories of language determined the way in which the *Cratylus* was read, I will start this paragraph by a brief presentation of the Stoic and Epicurean views on language. Next, I shall discuss the most substantial Middle Platonic discussion of the *Cratylus*, a section from Alcinoüs' *Handbook of Platonism*. This discussion will serve as a firm basis for the rest of the chapter, which will deal with such diverse authors as Antiochus of Ascalon, Plutarch of Chaeroneia, Philo of Alexandria, and finally Galen.

---

that Aristotelianism and Stoicism derived from Plato's philosophy, cf. also Boys-Stones 2001: 123–150.

<sup>3</sup> Dörrie-Baltes 1993: 196: "Kommentare zum **Kratylos** scheinen die Mittelplatoniker nicht verfaßt zu haben."

<sup>4</sup> For the slow adoption of the commentary as the format for philosophical writing by the Middle Platonists, see Westerink 1976: 8–10.

## 2. *Background: Stoic and Epicurean theories of language*

Whereas the central question in the *Cratylus* had been whether the correctness of names is a matter of convention (συνθήκη) or nature (φύσις), the central issue in Hellenistic theories of language was that of the origin of names, whether names are the product of imposition (θέσις) or of a spontaneous natural process (φύσις). Both in ancient and modern times the two questions tended to get confused, even though, as we shall see, many ancient author, including Alcinous and Proclus, were quite capable of distinguishing the two.<sup>5</sup> Even though these may be two different questions, they are not unrelated, for they both seek to answer the question of how language relates to reality and hence to the question of the role that language plays in philosophy.

In a well-known text, the patristic author Origen describes the positions of Aristotle, the Stoa, and Epicurus as follows:

**T. 2.1** We should respond to this that a deep and obscure debate bears on this topic, that of the nature of names. Are names, as Aristotle thinks, the product of imposition (θέσει)? Or are they, as the Stoics believe, the product of nature (φύσει), positing that the first sounds imitate the things to which the names belong, on the basis of which they propose some elements of etymology? Or are names, as Epicurus teaches, a product of nature yet in a manner different from that of the Stoics, since the first men uttered certain sounds concerning the things? (Origen *Contra Celsum* I 24).

Aristotle, as we have seen, holds that names are purely conventional, arbitrary symbols. By implication there is nothing natural about names, neither in the sense that names are (necessarily) images of their objects, nor in the sense that names are the product of nature. For that reason, he is here presented as the most prominent representative of the view that names are just the product of imposition.

In contrast to Aristotle, the Stoics hold that names are the product of nature in a manner that recalls Socrates' theory in the *Cratylus*. It is thus generally assumed that the *Cratylus* informed the Stoic theory of names.<sup>6</sup> Like Socrates in the *Cratylus*, the Stoics suppose that names are the product of a name-giver who designs names in such a way that they resemble their objects. Since names are thus determined by the nature

<sup>5</sup> On the issue, see Fehling 1965: 218–229.

<sup>6</sup> On the influence of the *Cratylus* on the Stoa, see, e.g., Barwick 1957: 70–79 and Long 2005.

of things, they may be regarded as the product of nature, even though they have been fabricated by a human name-giver. Names imitate their objects by means of the ‘first sounds’ (πρωταὶ φωναί) of which they are composed. These sounds are akin to the elementary names of the *Cratylus*.<sup>7</sup> According to Socrates, the sound ‘l’ evokes notions of smoothness and softness (*Crat.* 434c4–5). In a similar vein, the Stoics believe that because of these first sounds a name will generate the same sort of sensation in the hearer as the perception of the actual object would. The name ‘*lana*’ (wool, the example is from Varro) contains the smooth sound ‘l’. Hearing the name ‘*lana*’ thus produces the same sort of sensation as when we actually feel the smoothness of wool by touching it.<sup>8</sup>

Origen tells us that these ‘first sounds’ played a role in Stoic etymology. In fact, the very word ἐτυμολογία is of Stoic origin.<sup>9</sup> It does not, as is often thought, indicate the science of discovering the true meaning of a word, but instead that of finding in words the true facts (ἔτυμα) about the objects that they name.<sup>10</sup> It is at this point that Plato and the Stoics part ways. Even though Plato, like the Stoics, assumes that etymology reveals the opinions of the name-givers regarding the nature of things, he does not think that the study of names is in any way philosophically helpful. We have no reason to presuppose that the ancient name-givers enjoyed a better understanding of the world than we do. Rather the opposite appeared to be the case. The first name-givers focussed on the sensible, ever-changing world instead of on the real objects of knowledge, the intelligible realm.<sup>11</sup> Socrates urges his public to study the things themselves, apparently assuming that we may be capable of such a thing. The Stoics do not share Socrates’ pessimism about the capacities of the ancient name-givers. Quite to the contrary, they believe that the first humans actually understood the nature of

<sup>7</sup> Long 2005: 40–42 suggests that the Stoic theory was intended as an improved version of the Platonic theory. On the Stoic ‘first sounds’, see, e.g., Barwick 1957: 29, Allen 2005: 16–17, and Tieleman 1996: 198 and pp. 208–209 for a comparison to the *Cratylus*.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Varro fr. 113 Goetz-Schoell, cited by Long 2005: 41 and Sluiter 1990: 35–36.

<sup>9</sup> We know, e.g., of two books by Chrysippus entitled Περὶ τῶν ἐτυμολογικῶν πρὸς Διοκλέα and Ἐτυμολογικῶν πρὸς Διοκλέα (Diogenes Laertius VII 200, 9).

<sup>10</sup> On the meaning of ἐτυμολογία, see, e.g., Herbermann 1996; for the interpretation of etymology as the discovery of the true meaning of a word, see, e.g., L.S.J. s.v. ἔτυμος II.

<sup>11</sup> See pp. 15–16 above.

things far better than we do. Within this perspective it makes sense to study the names of things, since these contain bits of the superior insights of these primitive men. This is not to say that the Stoics follow Cratylus' claim that whoever knows a thing's name also knows the thing itself and that a thing's name is the best and only way to discover the nature of things.<sup>12</sup> Names, according to the Stoics, do not provide us with full-blown definitions. Further investigation will be necessary. Yet names yield sound conceptions that may function as a reliable starting point for further investigation.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, unlike Plato, the Stoics do not distinguish between ordinary language that may be unreliable, and a superior sort of philosophical language. Ordinary language is the only language there is and because of the wisdom of the ancient name-givers we may trust it to be correct. Since the Stoics maintain that there is no metaphysical realm, only this sensible world, the names coined by the ancients are supposed to refer uniquely to the material realm. This holds true also for the names of the gods. According to the Stoics, ancient myths are cosmological allegories. Elucidation of these myths, the Stoics believe, may help to confirm their own philosophy. Sadly though, the original myths had become distorted over time. For that reason the Stoics take a special interest in the etymology of the divine names that appear in those myths, since these names are not very likely to have been tampered with by later generations.<sup>14</sup> Cornutus, a Stoic philosopher from the time of Nero, provides a good illustration of this.<sup>15</sup> In his *Compendium of Greek Theology* he interprets Greek mythology in terms of Stoic cosmology, making frequent use of etymologies of divine names. He does so on the assumption that the ancients were competent students of the world and well equipped to philosophize about it by means of symbols and riddles.<sup>16</sup> His discussion of Hestia may serve as an illustration in point. Hestia (Ἑστία), he explains, is nothing else than the earth. The ancients called it Hestia because it remains stationary through everything (ταύτην

---

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 435d–436a.

<sup>13</sup> For a very instructive account of the function of etymology in Stoic philosophy, see Tieleman 1996: 196–218. On the theme of primitive superior wisdom in Stoicism, cf. Boys-Stones 2001: 28–59.

<sup>14</sup> On the Stoics' attitude to mythology and their etymologies of divine names, cf. Long 1996.

<sup>15</sup> On Cornutus, see Most 1989, especially pp. 207–209 for the role of etymology in Cornutus, Long 1996: 70–75, Boys-Stones 2001: 54–6.

<sup>16</sup> Cornutus c. 35 p. 76, 2–5.

μὲν γὰρ διὰ τὸ ἐστάναι διὰ παντὸς Ἑστίαν προσηγόρευσαν οἱ παλαιοὶ). She is sometimes called a virgin since, because she does not move at all, she does not produce anything.<sup>17</sup> I call attention to this etymology, not because it differs from that of Plato *Crat.* 401c–d, but because it clearly brings out that Cornutus believes that divine names refer to physical entities. As we shall see below, some Platonists such as Plutarch and Porphyry will, under the influence of the practice of Stoic etymology, make the same assumption, whereas others, such as Plotinus and Proclus, will assume that divine names refer to metaphysical entities.

When we turn next to Origen's presentation of the Epicurean position, we find that the Epicureans too held that names are the product of nature, be it in a different way. According to Epicurus *Ep. Hdt.* 75–76, initially at least, names did not come into being by imposition (τὰ ὀνόματα ἔξ ἀρχῆς μὴ θέσει γενέσθαι).<sup>18</sup> Sensory stimuli caused primitive men to exhale breath in a particular fashion, thus producing a certain sound. Proclus reports that we may compare these sounds to such spontaneous sounds like coughing, sneezing, bellowing, barking, and groaning.<sup>19</sup> Because of racial differences the same stimuli, e.g. seeing a tree, did not affect various tribes identically, thus triggering different reactions. This explains the diversity of languages. At a second stage, a tribe would together (κοινῶς) make certain impositions (τεθῆναι) in order to make the already existing language less ambiguous. At a third stage certain men came to know unseen entities to which they gave names. Most likely, Epicurus here refers to the discovery of such things such as time and void. These we cannot perceive themselves, yet we develop a concept of them from what we do perceive, such as the day turning into night and bodies moving from one place to another. Thus, according to Epicurus, some names were originally forced (ἀναγκασθέντας), i.e. natural reactions to stimuli, others the product of conscious reasoning (τῷ λογισμῷ).

Epicurus seeks to explain the relation between names and their objects in a natural way. He does away with the authoritative name-giver from the *Cratylus* and the Stoic theory. Later Epicurean authors heap ridicule

<sup>17</sup> Cornutus c. 28 p. 52, 4–7; 14–17.

<sup>18</sup> For a presentation of this text, see Long & Sedley 1987 text 19A; see Verlinsky 2005 for a recent discussion of this passage that takes stock of the extensive secondary literature.

<sup>19</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* XVII p. 8, 4–7, discussed at pp. 106–109 below; see Atherton 2005: 124–125 for an evaluation of this text as a testimony of Epicurus' theory.

on such a figure. Lucretius, for example, imagines how primitive men would soon get fed up with such a name-giver who constantly bleats to them meaningless sounds in their ears. Diogenes of Oenoanda thinks it completely absurd to presuppose that a name-giver would first assemble his fellow men (how could he manage to do that in those primitive times?) and then, like a schoolteacher, point with a rod to a thing and tell them to call it by this or that name.<sup>20</sup> Below, we shall see that Alcinous and Philo will respond to this point of criticism.

### 3. *A handbook on the Cratylus: Alcinous Didaskalikos c. 6, 159, 43–160, 41*

#### 3.1 The *Cratylus*: a logical dialogue on etymology

The darkness of time surrounds the ΔΙΔΑΣΚΑΛΙΚΟΣ ΤΩΝ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ ΔΟΓΜΑΤΩΝ, *Handbook of Plato's doctrines*. Its author, once commonly but wrongly referred to as Albinus, is nothing but a name to us: Alcinous. Its date of composition is unknown. Given its Middle Platonic content, it may have been composed at any place at any time in the first centuries CE, but given the complete absence of Neoplatonic elements, no later than the middle or late third century.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not one believes that Alcinous' work is a revision of handbook on Platonism by Arius Didymus, the experts' opinion is that he bases himself entirely on the work of his predecessors.<sup>22</sup> This lack of originality is only to be welcomed in view of the purpose of this chapter, the reconstruction of the standard interpretation of the *Cratylus* in Middle Platonic circles.

Alcinous discusses the *Cratylus* under the heading of logic, or dialectic (διαλεκτική), as he prefers to call it by a more Platonic name.<sup>23</sup> The topic of the dialogue is etymology:

**T. 2.2** Again, he [sc. Plato] gives indications of the ten categories both in the *Parmenides* and elsewhere, and in the *Cratylus* he goes thoroughly into the whole topic of etymology (ὁ ἐτυμολογικὸς τόπος). In general, the

<sup>20</sup> Lucretius *DRNV* 1050–5; Diogenes of Oenoanda 10, 2, 11–5, 15 (= Long & Sedley 1987 text 19c); cf. Atherton 2005 esp. pp. 108–109 and 113 for a discussion.

<sup>21</sup> On the *Didaskalikos*, see the masterly edition with translation and commentary by Whittaker-Louis 1990 and the English translation with commentary by Dillon 1993. For a discussion of Alcinous' treatment of the *Cratylus*, see also Tarrant 2000: 191–194.

<sup>22</sup> On Alcinous' dependence on predecessors and Arius Didymus in particular, see Dillon 1977: 269; Whittaker 1990: xvi–xvii; Dillon 1993: xxix.

<sup>23</sup> Alcinous *Did.* c. 5 p. 156, 24; for the term 'dialectic' being preferred over 'logic', see Dillon 1993: 72.



man was supremely competent in, and a connoisseur of, the procedures of definition, division <and analysis>, all of which demonstrate particularly well the power of dialectic (Alcinous *Did.* c. 6, p. 159, 43–160, 3).<sup>24</sup>

Middle Platonists routinely called the *Cratylus* ‘logical in character’ (χαρακτήρ).<sup>25</sup> This label refers to the tripartite division of philosophy into physics, ethics, and logic that Alcinous uses to structure his handbook.<sup>26</sup> This division was first introduced by Xenocrates, who succeeded Speusippus as head of the Old Academy. It was subsequently taken over by the Stoa and hence became highly influential.<sup>27</sup> This interpretation of the *Cratylus* as a logical dialogue was obviously inspired by the passage in which Socrates presents names as the tools of the dialectician.<sup>28</sup> Alcinous explicitly highlights this passage in the final paragraph of his discussion of the *Cratylus* that takes up nearly a quarter of the whole section dedicated to the dialogue.

Alcinous’ designation of the *Cratylus* as a work about etymology testifies of the influence of Stoicism. As we have seen in the previous paragraph, the very concept of ἐτυμολογία as a means of discovering the supposed wisdom of the ancients was a Stoic invention that was at odds with Plato’s own views on both the intellectual capacities of intellectual mankind and the trustworthiness of names. It is remarkable, then, to see that later generations hailed Plato as the first etymologist and the most successful one at that.<sup>29</sup> All Platonists that we shall discuss in this study suppose somehow that the *Cratylus* is, at least in part, a study in etymology. One explanation of why this misconception could

<sup>24</sup> All translations of Alcinous are by Dillon 1993.

<sup>25</sup> On the so-called ‘character’ of Platonic dialogues, see further Mansfeld 1994: 74–84. For the logical character of the *Cratylus*, see, e.g., Diogenes Laertius III 50 and 58, Albinus *Prologos* 3 p. 148, 31; Eusebius *PE* XI 6 (note that he too discusses the *Cratylus* at the very end of his treatment of logic); cf. Sextus Empiricus *Adv. Logicos* I 9, 3 (= *Adv. Math.* VII 9, 3) who does not mention the *Cratylus* by name, but tacitly refers to it.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Alcinous *Did.* c. 3 p. 153, 25–28.

<sup>27</sup> Sedley 1998: 149 f. makes the intriguing suggestion that this tripartite division of philosophy can in fact be traced back to the *Cratylus*. He points to the fact that the names that are discussed can be divided into nests of words in the sphere of cosmology or physics, ethics, and logic. The fact that the word ὄνομα, the thing under discussion in the *Cratylus*, is etymologized among other words that have logical connotations (*Crat.* 421a–b: ἀλήθεια, ψεῦδος, ὄν), suggests that Plato himself considered the *Cratylus* as a dialogue on a logical topic.

<sup>28</sup> See pp. 3–4.

<sup>29</sup> As claims Dionysius of Halicarnassos *De comp. verb.* p. 61, 18–63, 3 ed. Usener-Radermacher.

catch on is that the Stoic theory of the superior wisdom of primitive mankind became an universally accepted matter of fact. In his insightful book on post-Hellenistic philosophy, G. R. Boys-Stones has recently argued that in fact this theory determined the nature of all later ancient philosophy: because philosophers became convinced that the ancients had enjoyed this superior understanding, they started to perceive of philosophy not as an attempt to discover the truth by oneself, but as an attempt to rediscover the wisdom of the ancients.<sup>30</sup> Even though one may be critical of some aspects of Boys-Stones' study,<sup>31</sup> it seems obvious enough that later Greek philosophy, including notably the Platonists indeed, held ancient wisdom in high esteem, that they were therefore interested in etymology, and that this determined the way in which the *Cratylus* was understood.

Since Alcinous assumes that the analyses of names in the *Cratylus* are not just exegetical correct but philosophical as well, he assumes, like the Stoics, that etymology may play a role in philosophical investigations, i.e. in dialectic. A successful etymology reveals the essence of a thing and hence offers some kind of definition.<sup>32</sup> Giving definitions is a part of dialectic and this explains why Alcinous brings up the subject of etymology in a discussion of dialectic.<sup>33</sup> He may not say so in so many words, but this is at least implied in **T. 2.2** when, directly after identifying etymology as the topic of the dialogue, he continues to say that in general, Plato was supremely competent in the procedures of definition, division, and (perhaps) analysis. This idea of definition through etymology explains a subtle addition by Alcinous to what is basically a quotation from the *Cratylus*:

Plato *Crat.* 388 b13–c1: Ὄνομα ἄρα διδασκαλικόν τί ἐστὶν ὄργανον καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς οὐσίας ὥσπερ κερκὶς ὑφάσματος.

A name is a tool for giving instruction, that is to say, for dividing being, as the shuttle does for the weaving of cloth.

<sup>30</sup> Boys-Stones 2001, on Plato's own views on primitive mankind, see esp. pp. 8–14; on the adoption of the doctrine of primitive wisdom and the conception of philosophy as an attempt to retrieve this wisdom by later Platonists, see esp. pp. 99–122.

<sup>31</sup> For a critical discussion, see Mansfeld 2003; for my own views cf. Van den Berg 2001b.

<sup>32</sup> Alcinous *Did.* c. 6 p. 160, 23–25: “he is the best name-giver who indicates through the name the nature of the thing”.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Alcinous *Did.* c. 5, p. 156, 24–28: “Dialectic, according to Plato, has as its fundamental purpose first the examination of the essence of every thing, whatsoever, and then of its accidents. It enquires into the nature of each thing either ‘from above’, by means of division and definition, or ‘from below’, by means of analysis...”

**T. 2.3** Alcinous *Did.* c. 6 p. 160, 28–30: τὸ ὄνομα διδασκαλικόν τι καὶ διακριτικὸν τῆς ἐκάστου οὐσίας ὄργανον, ὡς ἡ κερκὶς τοῦ ὑφάσματος.

the name is an instrument which teaches about and distinguishes the essence of each thing, as the shuttle does for the weaving of cloth.

In the *Cratylus* names are supposed to cut up the totality of things (οὐσία). Alcinous adds ἐκάστου: a name is a didactic instrument which teaches and distinguishes the essence of *each* thing. It is instructive to compare this to the Sedley's discussion of names as instruments of instruction.<sup>34</sup> He distinguishes between two ways in which a name may be said to be an didactic instrument of division: by means of 'taxonomy' and by means of 'analysis'. In the first case, a name marks off some species as a species, e.g. woodpeckers from crows. In the second case, a name, by describing its object, separates that object's nature into, as it were, its ontological or definitional components, e.g., a woodpecker is an animal that is distinguished by its activity of pecking wood. Alcinous, I suggest, has the latter function in mind, whereas the text from the *Cratylus* points towards the former. Let it be added though, that as Sedley argues, these two functions are not mutually exclusive. After all, according to the *Cratylus* names are used by the dialectician to mark parts of reality that he has separated off by means of dialectical division while at the same time it is suggested that they are informative about the nature of their objects. So the addition of ἐκάστου does not do much harm, but still it is, I think, significant.

One would love to see Alcinous add some flesh to the bare bones of his theory, yet unfortunately he makes little of the etymologies from the *Cratylus*. In c. 27 p. 181, 5–6, he derives ἀρετή from αἰρετή, which recalls *Crat.* 415d4–5 ed. Burnet. However, this etymology is out of place and should be excised from the text of the *Cratylus*, as is indeed the case in both the old and new OCT editions. Alcinous c. 10 p. 165, 4 may vaguely echo *Crat.* 400 a 8–10. From this absence of etymologies in the *Didaskalikos*, it has been argued that—contrary to, for instance, Proclus in his commentary on the dialogue—Alcinous is not committed to any of the examples of etymology offered by Plato, but that his only interest is in the method or theory of etymology.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Sedley 2003: 59–66.

<sup>35</sup> Tarrant 2000: 191–193. This is, I think, not entirely true. Alcinous can clearly be seen to place emphasis on the theory regarding etymology: etymology provides both reliable and useful information about the nature of things. About a method of how to

This argument *e silentio* carries little conviction. If one sees Plato as the great authority, as Alcinous clearly does, it is only natural to be interested both in the skills of investigation of the master and in the results from the application of them by the master himself. The absence of etymological borrowings from the *Cratylus* in the *Didaskalikos* does not mean much. What we are being offered is a thumbnail sketch of Platonism, and we can only expect things to be absent.

Alcinous does not just relate the *Cratylus* to Stoic etymology but also to Aristotelian logic. In **T. 2.2**, e.g., he claims that Plato gives indications of the ten Aristotelian categories both in the *Parmenides* and elsewhere. This is not an isolated case. Throughout his discussion of Platonic dialectic, Alcinous will frequently claim Aristotelian and even Stoic logical discoveries for Plato. In doing so he is not alone. It had already been done from the times of Antiochus, about whom more below, onwards and was done by Alcinous' own contemporaries.<sup>36</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, Neoplatonists such as Porphyry will continue to operate on the assumption that Aristotelian logic is compatible with Platonic dialectic. Others though, including Plotinus and Proclus, will object to this harmonization of the two and stress that these are two different things all together. In fact, Proclus' critical attitude towards Aristotelian logic will to no small extent shape his *Commentary on the Cratylus*.

### 3.2 Names: by nature or imposition (φύσει ἢ θέσει)?

Once Alcinous has stated that the *Cratylus* is a logical dialogue dealing with etymology, he presents what he perceives to be the very core of the dialogue:

**T. 2.4** The subject matter of the *Cratylus* is as follows. Plato investigates whether names are the product of nature or imposition. He favors the idea that the correctness of names is a matter of imposition (θέσει), though not without qualification and not as if anything goes (οὐ μὴν ἀπλῶς οὐδὲ ὡς ἔτυχεν), but in the sense that the imposition is in accordance with the nature of the thing that is being named (ἀλλὰ ὥστε τὴν θέσιν γενέσθαι

---

etymologize successfully he keeps silent. It is easy to see why: there is no method to be found in the etymological extravaganza that is the *Cratylus*. Socrates claims to be driven forth by divine inspiration, not to have mastered any skill of etymologizing, and indeed it seems that any wild association goes in order to explain the meaning of a word.

<sup>36</sup> As observes Dillon 1993: 72.

ἀκόλουθον τῇ τοῦ πράγματος φύσει). For he believes that neither arbitrary imposition of a name is by itself enough to make a name correct, nor are nature and the first utterance, but a combination of the two so that each name is given conformable to the nature of its object. (Alcinous *Did.* c. 6, p. 160, 2–13).

Even though Alcinous' interpretation of the subject matter of the *Cratylus* is clearly informed by the Hellenistic debate about the origin of language, he shows himself aware that the problem discussed in the *Cratylus* is that of the correctness of language, not that of the origin of language. He apparently assumes that from Plato's theory about the correctness of language it follows that he rejects both the position that Origen ascribes to Aristotle, i.e. that names are the product of arbitrary imposition, and the position that the latter ascribes to Epicurus, i.e. that names were originally spontaneous utterances prompted by nature (ἡ φύσις καὶ ἡ πρώτη ἐκφώνησις).<sup>37</sup> For, if names were either completely a product of imposition or, reversely, of nature, there would not be incorrect names, whereas there evidently are.<sup>38</sup>

Like Origen, Alcinous here implicitly distinguishes between two ways of being 'by nature'. Those who accept nature and the first utterances as the origins of names, make nature the productive cause of names, i.e. nature makes us emit certain sounds when we perceive certain things and in this way produces names. However, as Alcinous sees it, nature is a 'paradigmatic' cause of names, i.e. names are modeled after the specific natures of their objects. The question whether according to Plato names are by imposition or by nature and, if so, in which sense, was a standard one in discussions of the *Cratylus*. As we shall see, Neoplatonists such as Proclus and Ammonius raised the same question and answered it in much the same way as Alcinous does here.<sup>39</sup>

It may seem strange that Alcinous assumes that the *Cratylus* is really about the question whether names are by nature or imposition, whereas he continues to point out that the *Cratylus* deals with the issue of the correctness of names. The reason is, I suggest, that Alcinous could not neglect the subtitle of the *Cratylus*. By Alcinous' time it had become customary to refer to Plato's dialogues by a double title, the first taken from the name of a *dramatis persona* (or, in the case of the *Symposium*, an

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the translation in Whittaker-Louis 1990: 'l'action de la nature'.

<sup>38</sup> Proclus will direct a similar argument against Aristotle, see p. 105 and p. 110 below.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. pp. 103–109 for Proclus, and pp. 201–205 for Ammonius.

event), the second one from the contents.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the *Cratylus* the title indicates that the correctness of names is the issue under discussion: Κρατύλος ἢ περὶ ὀρθότητος ὀνομάτων.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not the subtitle actually goes back on Plato,<sup>42</sup> it was perceived of as part of the text under discussion, not as a piece of commentary that one could ignore at will. Since the second title bears on the contents of the dialogue, it provides in a way a micro-interpretation of it. This poses a problem to those interpreters who want to take a different line on the text. They are thus forced to connect their interpretation in one way or another with this subtitle, as Alcinous does here. The same goes *mutatis mutandis* for Proclus, who believes that the *Cratylus* is about the human soul yet feels compelled to explain how this relates to the issue of the correctness of names.<sup>43</sup>

#### 4. *Tracing back the logical-etymological interpretation: Antiochus of Ascalon*

As we have seen above, Alcinous presents his interpretation of the *Cratylus* as a logical dialogue dealing with etymology as an established matter of fact. We do not know who was the first to put forward this interpretation, but a fascinating testimony about Antiochus of Ascalon (born around 130 BCE) from Cicero's dialogue *Academica Posteriora*<sup>44</sup> provides us with an interesting hint that this may in fact be a fairly early

<sup>40</sup> On the titles of Platonic dialogues, see Mansfeld 1994: 71–74.

<sup>41</sup> Whatsoever the origin of the subtitle may be, it fits the content of the dialogue very well. Hermogenes' brief speech at the beginning of the *Cratylus* (383a–384a) which introduces its subject-matter mentions the ὀρθότης of names no less than three times.

<sup>42</sup> According to Diogenes Laertius III 57–8 it was Thrasyllus, court astrologer to the emperor Tiberius, who systematically applied these double titles to the dialogues. In Thrasyllus' catalogue, as reported by Diogenes Laertius III 58–61, the *Cratylus* is indeed listed by this double name. However, as Mansfeld 1994: 71–74 argues, the majority of the first titles probably derive from Plato himself, whereas at least some of the second titles were already in existence before Thrasyllus, so that one may infer that Thrasyllus generalized the use of the second title. Be this as it may, the dialogue will be known under this double title down to the end of Antiquity (see, for instance, Philoponus *In Mete.* 17, 37 and Olympiodorus *In Alc.* 2, 89).

<sup>43</sup> See pp. 96–98.

<sup>44</sup> We depend almost entirely on Cicero to reconstruct Antiochus' thought. Dillon 1977: 62 thinks it reasonable to treat the Ciceronian evidence concerning Antiochus as if they were works of Antiochus. The use of Greek terminology in our testimony **T. 2.5**, to be discussed below, suggests that Cicero is writing with a Greek source or sources of some kind in front of him. Furthermore, Cicero had actually heard Antiochus teaching in 79 BCE in Athens.

interpretation of the *Cratylus*. Without explicit reference to the *Cratylus*, it sketches a view of names that resembles Alcinous' interpretation of the dialogue. This bit of information is all the more interesting since Antiochus holds a special position in the history of Platonism. Being a former pupil of Philo of Larissa, head of sceptical New Academy, he eventually turned against his teacher and his Academy, championing a return to what he perceived to be the dogmatism of the Old Academy. He appears to have initiated the search for doctrines in Plato and the construction of a transparent system that would eventually result in the dogmatic Middle Platonism of Alcinous and his like by means of relating Plato's dialogues to the philosophical systems of his successors.<sup>45</sup> More in particular, he advanced the claim that the Old Academy and the Peripatos were the same in all but name. Both schools were the lawful heirs to Plato's philosophy. They had developed a body of doctrine that left nothing to be desired. Therefore, it was only logical that Antiochus should turn to them for guidance. Cicero, indeed, presents Antiochus' position as the view of the 'ancients', the Platonists and Peripatetics of old who brought Plato's philosophy to perfection (the 'they' in **T. 2.5** below). Antiochus seems to have been especially indebted to Polemon, the last head of the Old Academy, who probably made much of the harmony between Plato and Aristotle.<sup>46</sup> Xenocrates may have been another source of influence on Antiochus. He seems to have indulged in some word-play in the spirit of the *Cratylus*. What is more, he was the first to develop the tripartite division of philosophy into ethics, physics, and logic that we have encountered in Alcinous. Therefore, there is a possibility that Alcinous' interpretation of the *Cratylus* as a logical dialogue on etymology ultimately dates back to the days of the Old Academy.<sup>47</sup> As for the Stoics, Antiochus seems to have been for more critically disposed towards them. On some issues they had departed from the true philosophy of the ancients. Even so, and this will be of importance for what follows, he embraced Stoic epistemology as a theory that does justice to Plato's spirit.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> On Antiochus as the initiator of these developments, see Karamanolis 2006: 44–84; on Antiochus of Ascalon, see further Dillon 1977: 52–106 and Barnes 1989.

<sup>46</sup> Dillon 1977: 57f.

<sup>47</sup> On Xenocrates, see Dillon 2003: 89–155; on his Cratylean word-play, see esp. pp. 101; on Xenocrates as the first to distinguish the three branches of philosophy, see esp. pp. 98–99.

<sup>48</sup> Thus Karamanolis 2006: 57.

Let us now turn to the text itself. Antiochus believed that, like so many other things, it was Plato himself who had invented the threefold scheme of philosophy.<sup>49</sup> Varro, the spokesman for Antiochus in the dialogue, refers to the third part, logic, by its Platonic name ‘dialectic’ (*dialecticae disciplina*), just as Alcinous does.<sup>50</sup> This is what, according to him, the joined chorus of old Academics and Peripatetics had to say on the subject:

**T. 2.5** Knowledge on the other hand they deemed to exist nowhere except in the notions and reasonings of the mind (*in animi notionibus atque rationibus*). And for that reason (*qua de causa*) they approved the method of defining things (*definitiones rerum*) and applied these definitions to all the things that they discussed. They also gave approval to the explication of words (*verborum explicatio*), that is, the statement of the reason why each class of things bears the name that it does—the subject termed by them ἐτυμολογία; and then they used these as ‘tokens’ (*argumentis*) or so to say marks of things (*quasi rerum notis*), as guides for arriving at proofs or conclusions as to anything of which they desired an explanation; and under this head was imparted their whole doctrine of Dialectic (*dialecticae disciplina*), that is speech cast in the form of logical argument (Cicero *Acad.* I 32; trans. Rackham modified).

Antiochus’ description of names and their dialectical function contains Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic elements. Varro describes words as *argumenta* (tokens) and *notae* (marks). These are translations of the Greek σύμβολα.<sup>51</sup> The fact that Aristotle used this particular term to indicate that names are just a matter of convention does not seem to have bothered Antiochus at all, even though he adheres to the Platonic-Stoic idea that names follow the nature of things. Perhaps he used the word to bring out that names are not the products of nature but of human imposition. Also in line with Aristotle’s semantic theory, these tokens are supposed to refer to affections in the soul. As Varro explains in the text leading up to the passage quoted above, we cannot have knowledge about sensible things, just opinion, because these are either imperceptible or constantly changing. Knowledge is only possible of the

<sup>49</sup> Cicero *Acad.* II 19, see Barnes 1989: 81–83 for a discussion. Antiochus may well have had a point, if Sedley is right that this scheme is implicitly present in the *Cratylus*, cf. n. 00 above.

<sup>50</sup> See pp. 37–38.

<sup>51</sup> For ‘*argumentum*’ and ‘*nota*’ as translations of σύμβολον, see Reid 1885: 139, cf. Ruch 1970: 139. The key passage is Cicero *Top.* 35: “Itaque hoc idem Aristoteles σύμβολον appellat, quod Latine est nota”.



Forms, since there can be only knowledge of what is eternally stable. This is all very Platonic, less Platonic is that these Forms turn out to be general concepts constructed from sense-perceptions (i.e. ‘the notions and reasonings of the mind’). Other passages indicate that Antiochus equated these notions, and hence the Forms, with Stoic *ἐννοιαί* or *προλήψεις*, the precepts that, according to the Stoics, coincide with the meaning of words.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, Antiochus did not, or at least not primarily, consider the Forms as transcendent entities.<sup>53</sup>

Like Alcinous, finally, Varro presents etymology as a part of dialectic, because words are informative of the nature of the things to which they refer. Antiochus thus apparently assumed that words are natural in the way outlined by Origen and Alcinous. Against Plato’s explicit warning no to, Antiochus availed himself of etymology in the manner of the Stoics in order to get his philosophical investigations under way. The far-reaching consequences of the adoption of Stoic etymology for the way in which Platonists understood the *Cratylus* becomes especially evident in the case of our next author, Plutarch of Chaeroneia.

### 5. *Plutarch of Chaeroneia: the Cratylus as a theological dialogue*

Plutarch of Athens (c. 45–c. 125)<sup>54</sup> stands out among the Middle Platonists for the impressive quantity of his surviving writings. All the same, when we turn to his oeuvre, it is immediately clear that Plutarch for all his love for learning had little interest in the *Cratylus*.<sup>55</sup> Yet, however few the references to the *Cratylus*, Plutarch makes for an interesting paragraph in the history of the reception of that dialogue. In line with his intellectual environment he assumes that names follow nature, and that they allow us access to the wisdom of the ancients who coined them. But what is more, he appears to be especially interested in

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cicero *Acad.* II 30; *De Fin.* V 59, discussed by Karamanolis 2006: 64–65; cf. Görler 2004: 94–97.

<sup>53</sup> On Alcinous’ interpretation of the Forms as concepts, rather than metaphysical entities, see Dillon 1977: 92–93; cf. Karamanolis 2006: 62–63.

<sup>54</sup> For Plutarch’s dates, see Dillon 1977: 185f.

<sup>55</sup> The index of Plutarch’s quotations compiled by Helmbold and O’Neil (1959) lists only 14 places in Plutarch that recall passages from the *Cratylus*, five of which appear to have no direct bearing on the dialogue (the four places bracketed by Helmbold-O’Neil themselves as well as Plutarch 617d, which does not refer to Plato *Crat.* 409d). The compilers missed some other references, though.

the proper names of gods as a source of theological wisdom and is thus one of the first witnesses of a theological approach to the *Cratylus*, which will eventually find its spectacular culmination in Proclus' commentary on the dialogue.

Plutarch was a deeply religious man, who took his office as priest of Apollo at the god's illustrious temple at Delphi very seriously. A man with such a mind-set was inevitably drawn to the etymologies of divine names in the *Cratylus*. In the context of a discussion about the exact whereabouts of the Muses in the ninth book of *Table-Talk* (*Quaest. Conv.*), Plutarch writes:

**T. 2.6**...Plato himself believes that he discovers the powers of the gods by using their names as clues...(*Quaest. Conv.* 9, 14, 746b).<sup>56</sup>

On the basis of the name of the Muse Οὐρανία, for example, he argues that she only should be located the heavens (τὰ οὐρανία), whereas the other eight Muses must be supposed to dwell on earth instead. The setting of the work, a symposium, throws an interesting light on the *Sitz im Leben* of many etymologies. Etymologizing was a popular game at symposia. Socrates probably had such a game in mind when he introduced his explanation of the word οἶνος (wine) by assuring Hermogenes that “nothing needs to stop us from going through playful etymologies as well, because even the gods love to play”.<sup>57</sup> It is certainly no coincidence that in *Quaest. Conv.* 715a Plutarch cites this etymology, as did Athenaeus (around 200 CE) in his version of such a party (*Deipnosophistae* 2, 1, 19–22). Yet, at the same time this remark also implies that not all etymologies were put forward in jest. In keeping with this, Plutarch took the idea of meaningful names seriously, as appears from his *On Isis and Osiris* (*De Is.*), the work that contains one third of all the references to the *Cratylus* in Plutarch.

In this treatise addressed to a certain Clea, a follower of Isis, Plutarch discusses and interprets the myths and rituals concerning the goddess. He holds that the acquisition of sacred lore constitutes a holier task than all ceremonial purification (c. 2, 351e). The first thing that he does to that extent is to offer etymologies of the names of Isis, her opponent Typhon, and that of her sanctuary, the Iseion (c. 2, 351e–352a). The

<sup>56</sup> Πλάτων αὐτὸς ὥσπερ ἔχνεσι τοῖς ὀνόμασι τῶν θεῶν ἀνευρίσκειν οἴεται τὰς δυνάμεις.

<sup>57</sup> *Crat.* 406c2–3.

name Ἴσις, which Plutarch believes to be Greek, is associated with εἰδέναι (because of the root \*ἴσ-) and ἐπ-ισ-τήμη: Isis is a truly wise goddess and a philosopher.

“The true devotee of Isis”, he writes, “is he, who, whenever he hears the traditional view of what is displayed and done with regard to these gods examines and investigates rationally (λόγῳ) and philosophizes what truth there may be within.”<sup>58</sup> Plutarch assumes that the names of the gods are meaningful. He explains that in the Egyptian language the name of Sarapis is associated with the word that denotes joy and gladness. The Greek name for the god of the nether-world includes the same unexpectedly positive associations:

**T. 2.7** For Plato says that Hades has been called by his associates a rich and friendly god (cf. *Crat.* 403e for the pun on πλούτος/Πλούτων). Among the Egyptians many other names contain a *logos*;... (*De Is.* c. 29, 362d).

Plutarch’s observation that many divine names contain a *logos* recalls Socrates’ remark (*Crat.* 396a) that the names of Zeus constitute a *logos* that describes the nature of that god.

One should not, Plutarch continues, be surprised to find that the religious customs of the various nations even though they differ refer to the same theological reality:

**T. 2.8** nor do we regard the gods as different among different peoples nor as barbarians and Greek and as southern and northern. But just as the sun, moon, heaven, earth and sea are common to all, though they are given various names by various peoples, so it is with the one *logos* which orders these things and the one providence which has charge of them, and the assistant powers which are assigned to everything: they are given different honors and modes of address among different peoples according to custom (ἕτεροι παρ’ ἑτέροις κατὰ νόμους γέγονασι τιμαὶ καὶ προσηγορία)... (*De Is.* c. 67, 377f–378a).

This interesting passage recalls Socrates’ thesis (*Crat.* 389d–390a) that Greek and barbaric names may be equally correct. Even though the ‘modes of address’, i.e. the divine names, may be different, they all express the same religious concepts. Plato was not the first to make this suggestion. It can already be found in, e.g., Herodotus *Histories*, which are themselves a product of the intellectual climate of the late fifth

<sup>58</sup> *De Is.* c. 3, 352c; this and other trans. of *De Is.* after Griffiths 1970.

century BCE.<sup>59</sup> It should be noted that Socrates only says that Greek and barbaric names *may* be equally correct, not that they necessarily are. Names express after all just the opinions of the name-givers, and Socrates gives no reason why we should assume that all name-givers of all nations held the same opinions. However, as we have seen, the Middle Platonists trusted etymologies because they believed that the first name-givers had grasped the nature of things. If this goes for all name-givers of all nations, we may assume that the concepts expressed in all languages are identical.

Plutarch next peruses the various interpretations of the myth of Isis and Osiris. Disappointed by the more literal ones, he turns to a more philosophical type of interpretation of the material in which etymologies appear to play an important role. He introduces this new line of interpretation as follows:

**T. 2.9** Let us first examine the most lucid of those who claim to have something more philosophical to say from another standpoint. These are the people who say that, just as the Greeks explain Kronos allegorically as time (χρόνος), Hera as air (ἀήρ), and the birth of Hephaistos as the change of air into fire, so among the Egyptians Osiris is the Nile... (*De Is.* c. 32, 363d).

The mode of interpretation that Plutarch here describes, the one that he himself favors, is that of the Stoic Cornutus. Both assume that ancient mythology contains some sort of primitive philosophy of nature. Etymologies of divine names in particular provide access to this ancient wisdom.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, they both assume that the myths of the various nations all testify of one universal wisdom.<sup>61</sup> Since myths are supposed to contain universal wisdom, Plutarch hastens to point out that according to more senior Egyptian priests, Osiris does not just represent the Nile but the humid element in general.<sup>62</sup> Plutarch thus recognizes in the anonymous Egyptian sage who composed the myth and the divine names of Isis and Osiris a distant colleague of Plato

<sup>59</sup> On Herodotus on divine names, see Burkert 1985, Thomas 2000: 274–284, Van den Berg 2006.

<sup>60</sup> On Cornutus, see pp. 35–36 above. For parallels between Plutarch and Cornutus, cf. Boys-Stones 2001: 108–113.

<sup>61</sup> Cornutus c. 28 p. 54, 12–21; for Plutarch cf. **T. 2.8** above.

<sup>62</sup> *De Is.* c. 33, 364a; cf. c. 66: if this myth would only apply to Egypt, the rest of humanity would be robbed of such great gods like Isis and Osiris, which is inconceivable.

and Aristotle: Osiris, the humid element, “is the better god, as both Plato and Aristotle conceive”.<sup>63</sup>

This remark introduces c. 60 in which Plutarch appeals to the etymologies from the *Cratylus* in order to corroborate his interpretation of Isis. It is our best testimony for Plutarch as a reader of the *Cratylus* and therefore deserves to be quoted in full. Note that Plutarch assumes that in the *Cratylus* Plato undertakes a project comparable to his own enterprise, the retrieval of the views of the ancients by means of etymology:

**T. 2.10** For the name Ἴσις is not barbaric, but just as all gods (θεοί) have a common name derived from “what is seen” (τοῦ θεατοῦ) and “what rushes” (τοῦ θέοντος cf. *Crat.* 397d4), so this goddess, because of her understanding and movement (ἀπὸ τῆς ἐπιστήμης ἅμα καὶ τῆς κινήσεως), is called Isis by us, and Isis by the Egyptians. Thus Plato also says that the ancients clarified οὐσία by calling it ἰσία (cf. Plato *Crat.* 401c or 421b); thus one assigns thought and insight, in that it is the impetus and movement of a mind which is striving and hastening (τὴν νόησιν καὶ τὴν φρόνησιν, ὥς νοῦ φορὰν καὶ κίνησιν οὐσαν ἱεμένου καὶ φερομένου) and also intelligence and the good in general (cf. Plato *Crat.* 411d–412c), as well as ἀρετή (virtue), to those things that flow easily and rush (τοῖς εὐροοῦσι καὶ θέουσι), just as again the evil which hinders, binds and checks nature, preventing its striving and moving, is abused by the opposite names when people call it κακ-ία (evil), ἀπορ-ία (helplessness) or δειλ-ία (cowardice) and ἀν-ία (trouble) (cf. Plato *Crat.* 415a–415e) (*De Is.* c. 60, 375c–d).

Plutarch is notorious for his imprecise references. Working at great speed and putting much, if not too much, trust in his memory, he often goes astray. An example is his claim that Plato says that the ancients clarified οὐσία by calling it ἰσία. All commentators agree that Plutarch has *Crat.* 401c in mind where Plato explains οὐσία from ἐσσία, which, of course, is not the same as ἰσία, a word that does not exist in Greek.<sup>64</sup>

But things are even worse. Plutarch is not just very sloppy, he seems completely at sea about one of the central messages of the *Cratylus*. He identifies Isis with the good, animate and intelligent movement that is the creative and conserving element of nature and he derives

<sup>63</sup> *De Is.* c. 60, 375c.

<sup>64</sup> See, e.g., Babbitt 1936: 143 note d; Griffiths 1970: 215; Froidefond 1988: 307 additional n. 5 to p. 231; Froidefond explains: “ἰσία = εἰ—ια: ‘direction’ (?)”. Does Plutarch perhaps have *Crat.* 421b in mind, where Socrates derives οὐσία / τὸ ὄν from ἰὸν rather than *Crat.* 401c?

her name from ‘moving with understanding’ (Plutarch *De Is.* 375c: διὸ τὸ μὲν Ἰσιν καλοῦσι παρὰ τὸ ἴεσθαι μετ’ ἐπιστήμης καὶ φέρεσθαι, κίνησιν οὖσαν ἔμψυχον καὶ φρόνιμον·). Plutarch then lists a series of etymologies borrowed from *Crat.* 411d–412c that show that intelligence etc. is associated with movement. However, Plato later on in the dialogue questions the correctness of these etymologies that assume a Heraclitean worldview. He thus undermines the etymology that associates ἐπιστήμη with movement and indeed suggests the opposite, i.e. that ἐπιστήμη makes the movements of the soul stop (*Crat.* 437a). One wonders where this leaves all the other etymologies that associate thinking, intelligence and so forth with movement. By the same token, it seems unlikely that in the end Plato really wants us to accept the exegetical and philosophical correctness of those etymologies that suggest that good things are subjected to movement, whereas bad things are associated with stagnation and standstill. Given that he ridicules Cratylus’ Heraclitean worldview by calling it ‘a world of dripping noses’ (*Crat.* 440d1), probably not.

In short, Plutarch, under the influence of the Stoic theory of etymology and primitive wisdom, was drawn to the etymological section of the *Cratylus*. Such was the spell of the Stoic theory of etymology that he failed to notice the general message of the *Cratylus* that we should investigate the things themselves rather than their names. His was, as we have seen, by no means an unique case among the Middle Platonists.

## 6. Philo of Alexandria

### 6.1 Philo’s use of etymology

Philo of Alexandria (born c. 20–15 BCE) presents a special, though interesting, case in the history of the reception of the *Cratylus*. A Jew by birth, his upbringing had been Greek to such a degree that he was unable to read the *Pentateuch* in Hebrew and had to rely on the Greek *Septuagint* translation.<sup>65</sup> This particular background and upbringing produced a pious Jew who was in love with Greek culture, and especially with Greek philosophy. He combined his religious zeal with his intellectual interests by setting himself the task to show that the *Pentateuch* was not

<sup>65</sup> On Philo’s education, see Runia 1986: 32–37 (*Chapter three: The Historical and Cultural Setting*).

as primitive as it might appear to be to a cultured man by writing many voluminous commentaries. By means of the well-tried Stoic method of allegorization and etymologizing he attempted to show that Moses, the alleged author of the *Pentateuch*, was the ultimate wise man who dwarfed Greek philosophers like Plato. Allegorical interpretations yield what one puts into it and consequently Philo's Moses appears as Middle Platonist. This was no cause for concern to Philo. If Moses' teachings resemble those of Plato, it is because the latter depended on the former and if everybody agreed that Plato was an intellectual giant, Moses, by the same token, had to be an even greater one. Philo's works thus provide a rich source of contemporary philosophical ideas, especially of those of the Middle Platonists.

Even though Philo does not explicitly refer to Plato in general nor to the *Cratylus* in particular, he has clearly taken note of the *Cratylus* and its contemporary interpretation.<sup>66</sup> This appears first of all from his method and his justification of it. As we noted, Philo, like Alcinous and Antiochus, took the Stoic idea of etymology seriously. In fact, it is an important tool in his efforts to interpret the *Pentateuch* philosophically.<sup>67</sup> This use of etymology, however, is not unproblematic since Philo works on the basis of the Greek *Septuagint*, not the Hebrew *Pentateuch*, and his etymologies are with a few exceptions etymologies of Greek words.<sup>68</sup> Yet, Philo feels justified in doing so, since he believes that the translators of the *Septuagint* were guided by divine inspiration. Because of this, they rendered each Hebrew word with its precise Greek equivalent to the result that someone who knows both Greek and Hebrew considers the two translations "as sisters, or rather one and the same, both in matter and words" (Philo *Mos.* 2, 39–40). This supposed equivalence of languages strongly recalls Socrates' claim (*Crat.* 389d–390a) that barbaric and Greek names may be equally correct, provided that they express the same thing.<sup>69</sup>

---

<sup>66</sup> For possible relations between Philo's writings and the *Cratylus*, see Boyancé 1975; Dillon 1978; Lamberton 1986: 45–6; Winston 1991.

<sup>67</sup> Philo uses the actual term ἐτυμολογία, see, e.g., *Plant.* 165. He borrows, albeit sparingly, etymologies from the *Cratylus* itself, see, e.g., *Spec.* 4, 235 (*Crat.* 410d) and *Virt.* 14 (*Crat.* 411e). On the (lack of) influence of Stoic hermeneutics on Philo, see Long 1997.

<sup>68</sup> Philo only rarely offers etymologies of Hebrew names, on which see Winston 1991: 119–120.

<sup>69</sup> Winston 1991: 118.

Interestingly, the same idea is also expressed by ps.-Aristeas in his letter to Philocrates about the origin of the *Septuagint* translation. Ps.-Aristeas, who pretends not to be a Jew, but probably was, describes how he pleaded the case of the oppressed Jews with king Ptolemy at the time of the translation of the *Septuagint*. He stresses that the religious ideas of the Jews do not differ significantly from those of the Greeks:

**T. 2.11** God, the overseer and creator of all things, whom they worship, is He whom all men worship, and we too, Your Majesty, though we address Him differently, as Zeus and as Dis; by these names men of old not unsuitably signified that He through whom all creatures receive life and (δι' ὧν ζωοποιοῦνται τὰ πάντα) come into being is the guide and lord of all" (*Aristeae Epistula* 16; trans. Hadas).

Both Jews and Greeks thus share the same conception of God as the ultimate cause of the universe and lord of all, even though they refer to him by different names. The etymologies of the name of Zeus recall the *Cratylus* (395e–396a). Or rather, they recall the Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Cratylus* according to which the myths and divine names of the various nations, no matter how different they may seem, refer in fact to a shared understanding of the world. The Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Cratylus* is used to legitimize the attempts of hellenized Jews to bring their own ancestral tradition in line with that of the Greeks.

## 6.2 *Philo on Adam as a name-giver*

In keeping with his Hellenistic environment, Philo reflects on the origin of language. Especially the story of how Adam names all the creatures (*Gen.* 2:19) provided a commentator on the *Pentateuch* with a good opportunity to do so. Philo welcomes the story as evidence of the superiority of the Scripture over Greek philosophical thought:

**T. 2.12** Why does (God) bring all the animals to the man that he may give names to them?

Scripture has cleared up the great perplexity of those who are lovers of wisdom by showing that names exist by being given and not by nature, since each is an apt and naturally suitable name through the skilful calculation of a wise man who is pre-eminent in knowledge (Philo *QG* 1, 20; trans. Marcus).

Philo appears to be of the same mind as Alcinous and Antiochus: names are a matter of imposition according to the nature of the thing



being named.<sup>70</sup> The activity of properly naming can therefore not be the work of just anyone, but requires a skilled person. This person is Adam. Names are thus the product a human invention, not a matter of divine revelation. It is worth observing that the story in *Genesis* does not necessarily imply this. From the phrase ‘God said’, which occurs before the naming episode, some Christian authors like Eunomius and Lactantius, will later deduce that language must be prior to human invention.<sup>71</sup> Philo, on the other hand, stresses elsewhere that names and language are something characteristic of human beings and therefore beneath the dignity of God.<sup>72</sup> In later times, Alexandrian Neoplatonists too will stress that names and language are particularly human and that the gods have nothing to do with these, contrary to Neoplatonists such as Proclus who claim that human name-givers follow a divine example.<sup>73</sup> As we shall see in the case of the Neoplatonists, the question whether the divine is an exemplary name-giver or not depends on what one believes to be the objects of names. If one believes that these are Platonic Forms, as some Neoplatonists had, it seems logical that the divine is a superior name-giver since it has a better access to the Forms. If one believes, with Aristotle, that names depend on the affections of material objects on the soul by means of sense-perception, it becomes less likely that an immaterial being like God has anything to do with it.

Philo follows the Aristotelian line, as appears from his discussion of Adam’s extraordinary qualities as a name-giver:

**T. 2.13** For the native reasoning power in the soul (sc. of Adam) being still unalloyed, and no infirmity or disease or evil affection having intruded itself, he received the impressions made by bodies and by objects in their sheer reality, and the titles he gave were fully apposite, for right well did he divine the character of the creatures he was describing, with the result that their natures were apprehended as soon as their names were uttered (Philo *Opif.* 150; trans. Colson and Whitaker).

Like Aristotle and Antiochus, Philo assumes that names refer to concepts that are the product of sense-perception. Philo here gives a justification

---

<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, the text has only been preserved in an Armenian version of the Greek. One would love to know what Greek terminology Philo is using here.

<sup>71</sup> As Allan 1948: 39 observes; Origen holds a comparable position, for which see Van den Berg 2006.

<sup>72</sup> Philo *Mut.* 64: “... God did not think fit to assign names... but committed the task to a man of wisdom, the founder of the human race...” (trans. Colson-Whitaker).

<sup>73</sup> See pp. 139–146.

for this assumption: primitive man, because of his unalloyed state, had a better understanding of the world than we moderns have. So he shares the assumption that underlies contemporary Stoic allegorical and etymological practice.<sup>74</sup>

If the idea that names depend on sensory impulses on the soul of material things is Aristotelian in nature, two other aspects recall the *Cratylus*. First, there is the special status of the name-giver, according to Socrates ‘the rarest of craftsmen’. Philo calls him ‘a wise man, who is pre-eminent in knowledge’. Secondly, there is the idea that correctly given names are by nature descriptive of their objects, something which, as we have seen, Aristotle rejects as a necessary requirement for names. Philo, however, pushes things further than Plato had done. He claims that Adam’s names were so apt that the natures of the things named were apprehended as soon as their names were uttered. He does not say by whom they were apprehended, but from *QG* I 20 we learn that these names fitted their objects so perfectly well that even an animal when it heard the name that Adam had given it “was affected as if by the phenomenon of a familiar and related name being spoken”. Compare this to the situation in the *Cratylus*, where, although names are supposed to be instruments of instruction, elaborate etymologies are necessary to bring out what words actually mean. Philo probably insists on the self-explanatory character of names in order to counter the Epicurean criticism of Platonic and Stoic theories of an authoritative name-giver, mentioned earlier (§ 2).<sup>75</sup> Nothing good lasts forever, though, and the episode of the tower of Babel marked the end of the self-explanatory, perfect language.<sup>76</sup> It opened the way for other less perfect languages, crafted by people working along the lines of Adam, some more successful than others in their attempts to encapsulate the essence of things in their names, some doing a better job than others.<sup>77</sup> This theory of *one* perfect or near perfect primordial language sets Philo apart from his intellectual surroundings.<sup>78</sup> There is no such theory to

---

<sup>74</sup> On the Stoa, see pp. 34–36; on Philo and his adoption of the Stoic idea of primal, superior wisdom, see, e.g., Boys-Stones 2001: 90–95 and Sluiter 1990: 18–20.

<sup>75</sup> For Epicurean criticism on the concept of a primal name-giver and other arguments that Philo employs against it, see Winston 1991: 109–112.

<sup>76</sup> As Winston 1991: 119 n. 28 points out Philo seems to have been unwilling to take the Babel story literally.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Winston 1991: 118–119.

<sup>78</sup> About this perfect primordial language, Dillon 1978: 40ff. comments that Philo’s story of such a language is an attempt to press the theory expounded in the *Cratylus*

be found in pagan Antiquity. Obviously this is because *Genesis* makes Adam *the* first man.<sup>79</sup> It may serve as a reminder that, however much Philo may have borrowed from contemporary philosophical discussions, he remains a special case.

### 7. *Galen: a dissident voice*

The picture that emerges from this chapter is that in the Imperial period it was generally assumed that Plato in the *Cratylus* had practiced Stoic etymology. The real message of the *Cratylus*, that we should study the things themselves instead of their names, was evidently lost on most of Plato's readers. The physician Galen (129–c. 200 CE), a great, if not uncritical, admirer of Plato, provides an exception to that rule:

**T. 2.14** If you are persuaded by me and Plato, you will always be scornful of names (τῶν μὲν ὀνομάτων καταφρονήσεις ἀεὶ) and will pursue first and foremost the knowledge of things (τὴν ἐπιστήμην τῶν πραγμάτων); and then, when you instruct another, you will strive for clarity (σαφήνεια), which you see Plato and me taking pains to achieve to the best of our ability (*De anatom. administr.* II 581 ed. Kühn).

Throughout his œuvre Galen appears extremely critical of Stoic etymology. Being a medical professional, he was not overly impressed by the primitive wisdom regarding the body and its functions to which the Stoa appealed. In *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, for example, he takes Chrysippus to task for calling on poets like Homer and etymology.<sup>80</sup> Etymology, he says, it is merely an impostor (ἁλαζὼν ἐστὶ μάτυρ ἢ ἐτυμολογία). It testifies both for those who speak the truth and those

---

to its logical conclusion. As we have discussed (see p. 4), Socrates in the *Cratylus* had argued that just as it does not matter whether a blacksmith executes the form of a drill one piece of iron or in another, likewise it does not matter whether one executes the form of a word in one set of sounds or another (*Crat.* 389d4–390a3). Yet, for the analogy to hold, Dillon argues, words should deviate in no more than minor details, since one piece of iron is pretty much the same as any other. Philo assumes that all languages in existence, including Biblical Hebrew, are imperfect in comparison to Adam's language, i.e. they are far less successful in imitating nature. Since they are so much unlike nature, they are also much unlike each other.

<sup>79</sup> Cf., e.g., Philo *QG* 1, 20: Adam, the first man, gives the creatures their names, for “it would have been vain and foolish to leave them without names or to accept to accept names from some other younger man to the disgrace and degradation of the honor and glory of the older man” (trans. Marcus 1953: 12).

<sup>80</sup> Galen *PHP* II 2, 5–7 ed. De Lacy; on this passage cf. Hankinson 1994: 17–171; Tieleman 1996: 16–17.

who speak falsehoods. For a full demonstration that etymology has no place in scientific discourse he refers to a now lost work of his, entitled *On the Correctness of Names* (πραγματεία περὶ ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος). Intriguingly, this is also the subtitle of Plato's *Cratylus*.<sup>81</sup>

This is not to say that Galen has no use for etymology whatsoever. As observes Daniela Manetti, Galen, like Socrates in the *Cratylus*, assumes that the analysis of names shows you the opinions of the name-givers. Galen does not assume that those ancient opinions are necessarily better than contemporary ones. His point is rather that different groups of language-users may understand a given word differently. A word still in use among contemporary doctors may have acquired a meaning that differs from the one it had for Hippocrates and his circle. A student of Hippocrates should thus try to uncover how a word was understood and used in Hippocrates' own time, instead of assuming too rashly that it means the same as in contemporary Greek.<sup>82</sup>

Correctness of names for Galen exists in clarity.<sup>83</sup> We achieve this clarity by consistently applying a name to similar types of things. If one proceeds like this, any name will do the job. Clarity is of the utmost importance, since, like Plato, Galen considers names as instruments of instruction:

**T. 2.15** However, anyone who wishes to teach another what he knows will need at any rate to use some names for things, and will have clarity as his aim in their usage. The best teacher's concern will be to assign names in such a way that the patient can learn in the clearest possible way (Galen *MM* X 81; trans. Hankinson 1994: 172).

This insistence on clarity as the virtue of language is Aristotelian, rather than Platonic. Aristotle, on the assumption that the sole purpose of language is communication, had argued that the sole virtue of language is clarity. Since clarity is best served when we stick as much as possible to the ordinary, conventional meaning of words, ordinary language is the norm both in ordinary as well as in philosophical discourse.<sup>84</sup> In Hellenistic times this demand for clarity was adopted by Stoics and

<sup>81</sup> On the subtitle of the *Cratylus*, see § 3.2 above.

<sup>82</sup> On Galen's use of etymology, see Manetti 2003: 202–215; for an explicit comparison to the *Cratylus*, see p. 207.

<sup>83</sup> On Galen on the correctness of names, see Hankinson 1994: 171–180.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., Aristotle *Rhet.* III 2, 1404b1ff.: “the virtue of speech is to be clear, as is proved by the fact that speech which fails to convey a plain meaning will fail to do just what speech has to do.” On this topic, see further Mansfeld 1994: 25ff.

Epicureans alike. Epicurus himself, for example, was said to have used the ordinary terms (κέχρηται δὲ λέξει κυρίῳ) for things and to have insisted on clarity in his, now lost, *On Rhetoric*.<sup>85</sup> Galen here refers to it by the technical term ἐλληνίζειν, “expressing oneself in accordance with ordinary Greek usage”.<sup>86</sup> Galen assumes that ordinary language is, in principle at least, capable of expressing the outcome of scientific research. Like Aristotle, he is confident that by nature living beings are able to acquire reliable concepts of reality by means of senses and intellect. Chickens, e.g., instinctively flee hawks, because they have a concept of what a hawk is. Such concepts inform our names. Language thus mirrors nature. However, those natural concepts do not necessarily reveal the essence of a thing. Language offers us a rough classification of reality, scientific research into the essence of things reveals the reasons why the classes divide in the way they do.<sup>87</sup> This approach is, of course, the one that Aristotle proposes in the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>88</sup> In the next chapter we shall see that Neoplatonists such as Porphyry too insist on ἐλληνίζειν for much the same reasons. So, while Galen explicitly follows Plato in rejecting etymology as a means of doing philosophy, he does not heed his warning that the way in which language divides reality may not be the correct one.

### 8. *Conclusions*

Even though it would be wrong to speak of *the* Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Cratylus*—there existed after all no authority to determine the orthodoxy—it seems safe to talk about certain general tendencies in Middle Platonic approaches to the *Cratylus* and its issue, the nature of names. These tendencies, it has appeared, were shaped by philosophical developments in the Hellenistic and post-Hellenistic

---

<sup>85</sup> As reports Diogenes Laertius X 13–14. In the case of the evaluation of Epicurus’ style it has been argued that κύριος here means ‘proper’ instead of ‘ordinary’, since Diogenes Laertius continues by adding that the grammarian Aristophanes accused Epicurus of having a very personal style because of this. However, as observes Sluiter 1995: 526–527, this comment misses the point: on the Aristotelean view supported by Epicurus ordinary language *is* the standard for proper language, a point of view with which a grammarian might wish to disagree.

<sup>86</sup> See, e.g., *Meth. Med.* X 71; on Galen on clarity, ἐλληνίζειν, and related issues from a grammatical and a rhetorical point of view, see Sluiter 1995.

<sup>87</sup> Thus Hankinson 1994: 181–187.

<sup>88</sup> See pp. 24–28 above.

period, all the more so since the Middle Platonists read Plato's dialogues in conjunction with Hellenistic and Peripatetic philosophy in order to get Platonic doctrines out of Plato's dialogues. One notable result is that the Middle Platonists tended to associate the *Cratylus* with the typical Hellenistic issue of the origin of language, the question whether names are the product of nature or human imposition (φύσει ἢ θέσει). Plato, it was deduced from the *Cratylus*, taught that names are by imposition, be it that they follow the nature of things. In order to bring this out, they are often called σύμβολα, a term borrowed from Aristotle's semantic theory that underlines the artificiality of names.

The same approach led Platonists to associate the analyses of names in the *Cratylus* with the Stoic method of ἐτυμολογία. Whereas Plato had intended the *Cratylus*, at least in part, as a warning against putting too much trust in the analyses of names as a source of wisdom, the Middle Platonists agreed with the Stoics that since primitive man had enjoyed an unusually deep insight in the nature of things and since he had embodied these insights in the names of things, the study of these names could teach one something about the nature of things. Thus, they took what they perceived of as the etymological section of the *Cratylus* seriously, so seriously in fact, that the Socratic irony that pervades much of this section was lost on them. These etymologies do not just point to a quality of the thing under discussion, but to its essential quality that makes it different from all other things. Since dialectic does the same thing, etymologizing is part of doing dialectic, and hence the *Cratylus* was interpreted as a logical dialogue. Finally, as far as our sources permit us to tell, names refer not to Platonic Forms, but to the concepts of material things that we have acquired through the senses.<sup>89</sup>

In the next chapter we shall see that the increasing careful study of both Aristotle and Plato will prompt philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus to question some results of this approach, in particular the association of the *Cratylus* with Aristotle's semantic theory. Even so, some elements of the Middle Platonic reading, such as the interpretation of the *Cratylus* as a logical dialogue and the association of the *Cratylus* with etymology, will be maintained throughout Antiquity.

---

<sup>89</sup> Yet it should be added that this observation derives from relatively early Middle Platonists whose interest in the theory of Forms was limited anyway, and that therefore we should be careful in applying it to later Middle Platonists.



## CHAPTER THREE

### PORPHYRY'S ARISTOTELIAN SEMANTIC THEORY AND PROCLUS' PLATONIC CRITICISM OF IT

#### 1. *Introduction*

In the previous chapter we have seen that many Middle Platonists such as Antiochus and Alcinous assumed, either implicitly or explicitly, that Plato, Aristotle and even the Stoics, agreed on many issues. This general assumption, it appeared, influenced their ideas about names and language as well as their interpretation of the *Cratylus*. From this, it should not be concluded, however, that all Platonists assumed that all of Aristotle was compatible with Plato. One's degree of appreciation of Aristotle depended largely on what one believed Plato's actual doctrine to be.<sup>1</sup> Some Platonists, such as Nicostratus and Atticus, even maintained that Plato and Aristotle were incompatible. Plato, after all, postulates the existence of intelligible Forms, whereas Aristotle denies the very existence of these. The discussion about the relation between Plato and Aristotle was continued by the Neoplatonists. In this chapter we shall see that the views on names and language of the various Neoplatonists, the way in which they read the *Cratylus*, and even whether they read it at all, depends on the more general question how they understand the relation between Plato and Aristotle. We shall see that Plotinus, who is critical of Aristotle, adopts a Platonic semantic theory such as we find it in the *Cratylus*, whereas Porphyry, who believes in the harmony between Plato and Aristotle, develops a highly influential semantic theory based on his study of Aristotle's *Categories*. Porphyry does not seem to have lost much time on reading the *Cratylus* and he may have failed to notice that it sits ill with his Aristotelian semantic theory. Yet, when his former pupil and in many respects most formidable opponent Iamblichus included the *Cratylus* into a list of dialogues that every aspiring Platonist was supposed to have studied, this was bound to come out.

---

<sup>1</sup> As remarks Karamanolis 2006: 21.



We know unfortunately little of how Iamblichus understood the *Cratylus*, but he appears to have tried to combine Porphyry's semantic theory with Plato's, as we shall see.

Iamblichus, by his inclusion of the *Cratylus* in the curriculum, stimulated further systematic study of the *Cratylus* and the Platonic semantic theory it contains then had hitherto been the case, eventually culminating in Proclus' commentary. That the latter had a keen eye for the problems with Porphyry's semantic theory from a Platonist point of view appears not just from that particular commentary, the subject of the three subsequent chapters, but also from his other writings. In this chapter, I shall focus on an important passage from the *Commentary on the Parmenides* that seems especially designed to refute Porphyry as well as one from the *Commentary on the Alcibiades* that claims an even greater authority for the Platonic theory than Plato, no one less than the divine Pythagoras himself.

## 2. Plotinus: naming Being

Plotinus nowhere offers a systematic discussion of his views on the relation between language and reality and doing philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Yet when one puts his relevant remarks together, it emerges that he holds a typically Platonic semantic theory, inspired by the *Cratylus*, that fits well with his way of doing philosophy. In this paragraph I shall especially concentrate on what he has to say about naming (intelligible) Being, especially in his treatise about the *Categories*, Aristotle's discussion of classes of names.<sup>3</sup> Since Porphyry's *Commentary on the Categories* is our most important source for his ideas about language, the present discussion will thus facilitate comparison between the two positions.

Before turning to Plotinus' discussion of the *Categories*, however, let us first take a look at his discussion of the etymology of εἶναι (i.e. intelligible Being) in *Enn.* V 5 [32] 5. Plotinus brings up this etymology in corroboration of his claim that intelligible Being proceeds from the One:

---

<sup>2</sup> For a systematic discussion of Plotinus' *obiter dicta* on language, see Heiser 1991, who has little to say about Plotinus' views on the *Cratylus* or on names and naming, but concentrates on *logos* instead.

<sup>3</sup> For the *Categories* as Aristotle's discussion of classes of names, see De Rijk 2002: 133–134.

**T. 3.1** And if someone says that this word εἶναι [being]—which is the name that signifies οὐσία [being]—has been derived from the word ἔν [one] he might have hit on the truth. For this which we call primary οὐσία proceeded, so to speak, a little way from the One, but did not wish to go still further, but turned inward and took its stand [ἔστη] there, and became Being [οὐσία] and the hearth [ἑστία] of all things. Imagine someone pronouncing the (the word εἶναι, RvdB), while pressing on the pronouncement of it:<sup>4</sup> in that case (the sound) ἔν is produced which manifests the origin from the One (τὸ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἑνός) while at the same time this uttered sound signifies being (τὸ ὄν), as best it can. In the same way that which came to exist, οὐσία and εἶναι, has an image of the One since it flows from its power; and the [soul] which sees it and is moved to speech by the sight, imitating what it saw (μιμουμένη ὃ εἶδεν), cried out ὄν and τὸ εἶναι and οὐσία and ἑστία. For these sounds intend to signify the real nature—the cry being the product of the travail of the soul,—imitating (ἀπομιμούμενοι), as far as they are able, the generation of real being (Plotinus *Enn.* V 5 [32] 5, 14–28; trans. after Armstrong<sup>5</sup>).

Several elements in this text evoke the *Cratylus*. First of all, Plotinus' speculation that οὐσία is related to ἑστία recalls the etymology of the name of the goddess Hestia in *Crat.* 401c4–9. It should be noted, however, that in general Plotinus shows little interest in the etymologies from the *Cratylus*, with the notable exception of that of the name Κρόνος.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> I.e. pronouncing it with a *spiritus asper*, see, e.g., Mackenna's translation and the note by Harder-Beutler-Theiler to their translation; *contra* Ferwerda 1982: 45 n. 5.

<sup>5</sup> This is a very free adaptation of Armstrong's translation of this very difficult text: "*interpretes intellegunt alii aliter*" (Henry-Schwyzler *ed. maior ad loc.*). For an alternative interpretation of this text, see Ferwerda 1982.

<sup>6</sup> Plotinus derives the name Κρόνος from κόρος (satiety), see *Enn.* III 8 [30] 11, 38–39 (discussed by Hadot 1981); V 1 [10] 4, 9–12; 7, 33–36 (discussed by Atkinson 1983: 78–79 and 177–179). The name is supposed to bring out the satiety, i.e. the fullness of intellect (νοῦς). According to Atkinson 1983: 78–79 (commenting on *Enn.* V 1 [10] 4, 9–12) Plato *Crat.* 396b5–6 only mentions κόρος in the sense of 'child'. He assumes that the derivation of Κρόνος from κόρος (satiety) is a Stoic etymology. Proclus *In Crat.* CVII p. 56, 24 ff., however, clearly assumes that Plato gives three interpretations of the name of the element κόρος in the name Κρόνος (τὸ Κρόνος ὄνομα τριχῶς ἀναλύεται νῦν): 'child', 'satiety', and 'pure'. Duke *et al.* in their OCT edition thus add οὐδὲ πλησμονήν, reading: κορὸν γὰρ σημαίνει, οὐ παῖδα <οὐδὲ πλησμονήν>, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρόν αὐτοῦ (cf. their *apparatus ad loc.*). However, according to Proclus, 'satiety' is the first (πρώτη) meaning of κόρος to be offered and rejected. This suggests that we should rather read οὐ <πλησμονήν> παῖδα, ἀλλὰ τὸ καθαρόν αὐτοῦ. However this may be, Proclus clearly indicates that Socrates rejects the interpretation of κόρος as 'satiety', as he does the interpretation of κόρος as child. The latter interpretation, too, is adopted by Plotinus in *Enn.* III 8 [30] 11, 38–39. Plotinus thus appears not to have been a very careful reader of the etymologies of the *Cratylus*.

Secondly, according to the *Cratylus*, not just anybody can be a true name-giver. Only the philosopher who knows the (metaphysical) nature of things is able to construct correct names, since names are supposed to bring out the nature of the things to which they refer. In a similar vein, Plotinus assumes that the names for intelligible Being were coined by a person who had actually seen that Being originates from the One (and hence should not be identified with the first principle). The names of Being imitate by means of sounds (cf. the role of primary names in the *Cratylus*) its procession from the One.

Thirdly, according to the *Cratylus* names may be used as instruments of philosophical instruction, precisely as Plotinus does here. In *Enn.* III 7 [45] 6 Plotinus explicitly calls attention to the didactic function of names when he discusses the name of αἰών (eternity), which he etymologizes as ὅς (always) ὄν (being).<sup>7</sup> Plotinus has just explained that eternity is the life of intelligible Being. True Being does not admit of any chance and thus transcends time. It exists in eternity, not in the sense of an indefinite long time but in the sense of a permanent ‘now’. Hence, the definition contained in the etymology of αἰών as ‘always being’ is at best a tautology and potentially harmful, since it may mislead people into believing that being is something that will exist for all times. In that case, Plotinus, explains, people do not use ‘always’ ‘in its strict sense’,<sup>8</sup> but in the sense of ‘being imperishable’. Plotinus explains why eternity is called αἰών all the same:

**T. 3.2** But even though ‘being’ was sufficient to indicate substance, since people also thought that becoming was substance, it was necessary to add ‘always’, in order to learn (πρὸς τὸ μαθεῖν) what being is (*Enn.* III 7 [45] 6, 27–29; trans. Armstrong adapted).

Finally, according to the *Cratylus*, correctly established names refer first and foremost to the unchanging Forms, rather than to their participants in the realm of flux. Plotinus appears to subscribe to this idea. According to **T. 3.1**, the names of being refer to primary οὐσία, i.e. intelligible Being, as also appears from the etymologies of the various names of being. If we next use the name of being for something in the sensible realm, we shall be using that name ‘analogously and homonymously’ (i.e. the name is not used in the same sense).<sup>9</sup> This last point brings us

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Enn.* III 7 [45] 4, 42–43.

<sup>8</sup> *Enn.* III 7 [45] 6, 23: οὐ κυρίως.

<sup>9</sup> *Enn.* VI 3 [44] 1, 6: ἀναλογία καὶ ὁμωνυμία.

to Plotinus' treatise on Aristotle's *Categories* (*Enn.* VI 1–3 [42–44]), where Plotinus elaborates on the relation between the names of intelligible Forms and their sensible participants. Aristotle's categories apply to beings in the sensible world. In *Enn.* VI 2 [43] 1, Plotinus protests that Aristotle uses the word 'being' (ὄν) incorrectly:

**T. 3.3** [W]e must in our discussion first of all make a distinction between what we call being, about which at present our investigation would be correctly conducted, and what others think is being, but we call it becoming, and say that it never really is (*Enn.* VI 2 [43] 1, 17–21; trans. Armstrong adapted).

'We' are, of course, the Platonists, for whom being is primarily unchanging metaphysical being, whereas 'they' are the Aristotelians who posit that "every being seems to signify a certain 'this'", a sensible particular.<sup>10</sup>

Plotinus next signals a trend, current no doubt among those who try to harmonize Plato and Aristotle, to consider intelligible, true being, and being in the realm of becoming as two different classes put under one genus. Surely, Plotinus protests, Plato would not make such a ridiculous division.<sup>11</sup> He continues:

**T. 3.4** For it is absurd to put being under one genus with non-being, as if one were to put Socrates and his portrait under one genus. For "making a distinction" here<sup>12</sup> means marking off and setting apart, and saying that what seems to be being is not being, [and by this Plato] indicates to them that what is truly being is something else (*Enn.* VI 2 [43] 1, 23–28; trans. Armstrong).

Plotinus thus clearly connects the issue of naming correctly to that of division. People wrongly call what is correctly called 'becoming' 'being' because of their incorrect division of reality, "as if one were to put Socrates and his portrait under one genus". Calling both Socrates the man from flesh and blood and his painted or sculpted portrait 'Socrates' is a standard example of homonymy (ὁμωνυμία), i.e. of applying one and the same name to two things that have two different definitions.<sup>13</sup> In fact, according to Plotinus, homonymy in the case of

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle *Cat.* 3b10: πάντα δὲ οὐσία δοκεῖ τόδε τι σημαίνειν.

<sup>11</sup> *Enn.* VI 2 [43] 1, 21–23.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Plato *Ti.* 27d5–7.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Aristotle's definition of homonymy in *Cat.* 1a1 f. (note, though, that Aristotle there talks about beings that are homonymous, not the homonymous use of names); for the example of the man and his portrait, see, e.g., Aristotle *Meta.* A 9, 991a 5–8:

intelligible Forms and the participants is of a special type.<sup>14</sup> It is after all no coincidence that Form and participant share the same name. The participant is like its Form, because the latter causes it. Because of this likeness it is called after its cause. All the same, the particular is not identical with its Form. Therefore, the description that goes with the name in the case of the participant is different from that in the case of the Form. Since the Form is ontologically prior, Plotinus assumes that the meaning of its name is the primary meaning of that name.<sup>15</sup> However, people tend to use names in their secondary sense, not in their primary sense, apparently because they are focused on the sensible realm. They do so even when discussing intelligible reality. This results in hopeless confusion, as can be seen not just from the case of Being but also from that of eternity, mentioned above. Since people understand ‘always’ not in its strict sense, but as ‘being imperishable’, they fail to understand that intelligible Being exists in the unextended now, but assume that it is something that exists through all times, whereas in fact it transcends time.

As we shall see shortly, Plotinus’ very Platonic idea that names refer primarily to intelligible realities and only homonymously to their participants was rejected by most Neoplatonists from Porphyry onwards, who assumed that language refers primarily to things in the sensible realm, and only homonymously to their intelligible causes. Plotinus’ position, it seems, fits his philosophical method that is founded on his optimistic theory about the status of the human soul. As is well known, Plotinus defends the thesis that the human soul is firmly rooted in the realm of Intellect. Therefore we actually have a quite good, if not perfect, grasp of the intelligible Forms. Our examination of reality should thus start from these metaphysical principles of the universe and then proceed downwards to the material realm.<sup>16</sup> Both Plotinus’ discussion of eternity and time and his discussion of the categories follow this top-down approach. In the case of eternity and time,

---

“but if the Form is not the same, they will simply be homonyms; just as though one were to call both Callias and a piece of wood ‘man’, without remarking any property common to them” (trans. Tredennick).

<sup>14</sup> Much has been written about this special type of homonymy in relation to Plotinus’ discussion of the *Categories*, see, e.g., Hadot 1990 esp. pp. 126–129; Aubenque 1985, esp. pp. 13–14; Chiaradonna 2002: 227–305.

<sup>15</sup> For the same point, see Heiser 1991: 12–16.

<sup>16</sup> As Chiaradonna 2002: 276–277 rightly observes.

Plotinus explicitly indicates that he prefers to approach time from the perspective of eternity, rather than the other way around.<sup>17</sup> In the case of his discussion of the categories, he first deals with the intelligible realm (*Enn.* VI 2 [43]) and only then turns to the categories that apply to the material realm (*Enn.* VI 2 [44]).<sup>18</sup> Within the context of such a top-down approach, it makes sense to assume that names refer primarily to intelligible reality. Because of his epistemological optimism, Plotinus is not very much interested in the analysis of language as a method of philosophical investigation. For, as Socrates observes at the end of the *Cratylus*, we may study the things themselves directly, rather than through their names.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the analysis of names is used to underscore a point already established (cf. **T. 3.1**) in order to persuade others of its correctness.

Furthermore, Plotinus' epistemology also explains the observation made at the beginning of this paragraph that Plotinus fails to offer a systematic discussion of the relation between language and philosophy. Language is typical of discursive reasoning as it occurs in the rational soul. Discursive reasoning does not allow us to fully grasp intelligible reality. However, the part of us that is rooted in the Intellect enjoys non-discursive, perfect knowledge of the intelligible. The Plotinian sage has managed to focus himself completely on the activity of this superior part of the soul. Even though he may use language in order to teach others, like Plotinus in the *Enneads*, he himself is past discursive reasoning and therefore has no particular interest in language.<sup>20</sup> The rejection of Plotinus' doctrine of the undescended soul by later Neoplatonists explains, at least to some extent, why they took a greater interest in language.

---

<sup>17</sup> Chiaradonna 2003: 222–223.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *Enn.* VI 2 [43] 1, 30–33 where Plotinus announces that he will first study intelligible Being, and only “afterwards, if it seems proper, we shall say something about becoming and what comes to be [i.e. what others regard to be being, see **T. 3.3**, RvdB] and the universe perceived by the senses (trans. Armstrong).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 438d–e.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Heiser 1991: 6–9 who illustrates this point by discussing Plotinus *Enn.* III 8 [30] 6, 36–38.

### 3. *Porphyry*

#### 3.1 Porphyrius' semantic theory

Porphyry, Plotinus' biographer and editor, was, like so many Neoplatonists, an intellectual omnivore and natural born commentator whose mission in life it was to shed light on the obscure, ranging from occult cult statues to Aristotle's notoriously difficult *Organon*. To the modern reader these may seem to be worlds apart. Not so to Porphyry—or indeed to most other Neoplatonists—and in order to get a good impression of his views on semantics in general and the *Cratylus* in particular, we shall have turn to very diverse texts.

Let us start with Porphyry's influential work on Aristotle's *Categories*. Like his teacher Plotinus, Porphyry spent much ink discussing this work, be it in an altogether different spirit. As we have seen, Plotinus shows himself rather critical of the fact that Aristotle applies the category of being to the sensible realm of becoming. This is not the only criticism that Plotinus levels against Aristotle's *Categories*. In fact, as R. Chiaradonna has argued, this critical approach characterizes Plotinus' attitude to Aristotle in general.<sup>21</sup> He is engaged in an ongoing critical dialogue with Aristotle, aiming at exposing the flaws of Aristotle's philosophy by calling attention to the problems that Peripatetic commentators on Aristotle themselves encounter when studying Aristotle. He then continues to demonstrate that one may solve these problems by accepting Plato's doctrine of the existence of intelligible causes of the physical world, thus demonstrating the superiority of the Platonic philosophical system over that of Aristotle. Porphyry's attitude towards Aristotle, and that of the Neoplatonic commentators on Aristotle in general, is precisely the opposite of Plotinus'. He does not set out to look for the flaws in Aristotle's philosophy, but to demonstrate the harmony between Plato and Aristotle instead. His work on the *Categories* is often, if not exclusively, read as a response to Plotinus' criticism in an attempt to save

---

<sup>21</sup> Chiaradonna 2005; on Plotinus' criticism of Aristotle's categories, see esp. *o.c.* pp. 238–259. Interestingly, Chiaradonna *o.c.* p. 247 n. 26 raises the question how Plotinus' anti-Aristotelianism compares to that of Syrianus and Proclus. From the analysis of Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* in chapter four below, it will appear that the numerous critical discussions of Aristotle's semantic theory in the *Commentary* serve the same purpose as the critical discussions in the *Enneads*.

the *Categories* for Neoplatonism.<sup>22</sup> If such was his purpose, his attempts were impressively successful, for the *Categories* became compulsory reading for future generations of Neoplatonists and his commentaries fathered numerous others, including those by Dexippus, Iamblichus and Simplicius, about which more below.

We shall now turn to Porphyry's extant small commentary in question and answer format—his large commentary on the same work is now lost—the first pages of which are our best source of Porphyry's ideas about language. It opens with the following question:

**T. 3.5** Why, given that in ordinary usage (ἐν τῇ συνηθείᾳ) the term κατηγορία denotes the speech of the prosecution against someone..., did Aristotle choose to violate accepted usage (ξενίζειν) by giving his book the title *Categories*?<sup>23</sup>

As will be recalled, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Galen had all insisted on clarity as *the* virtue of style, which should be achieved by using ordinary language.<sup>24</sup> Here we see that Porphyry too adopts this principle of the use of ordinary language, even though it is not Platonic. For, as we have seen, Plato holds that proper language is not necessarily ordinary language. We shall return to this issue later on in this chapter, when we come to discuss Proclus. It will appear that the latter consciously rejects the Aristotelian-Porphyrian ideas about clarity and ordinary language in favor of Plato's view.

Porphyry gives the following answer to the question that he has just put on the table:

**T. 3.6** Because ordinary language (συνήθεια) is for communicating about everyday things, and employs the expressions that are commonly used to indicate such things, but philosophers are interpreters of things that are unknown to most people and need new words to communicate the things they have discovered. Hence either they have invented new and unfamiliar expressions or they have established ones in extended senses (κατεχρήσαντο) in order to indicate the things they have discovered (Porphyry *In Cat.* 55, 8–14).

<sup>22</sup> For a well-argued alternative view of Plotinus' appreciation of the *Categories* and the relation between his treatment of the *Categories* and that of Porphyry, see De Haas 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Porphyry *In Cat.* 55, 3–7. Translations of Porphyry *In Cat.* are taken from Strange 1992.

<sup>24</sup> See pp. 57–58.



Let us take a closer look at the terminology that Porphyry uses here: Aristotle is charged to have deviated from ordinary language (συνήθεια). This is known as an act of ξενίζειν (cf. **T. 3.5**), i.e. to use a word in an outlandish fashion for something “for which this word is not used among the Greeks”.<sup>25</sup> The opposite of ξενίζειν is ἑλληνίζειν, i.e. to speak ordinary Greek. We have already encountered this term in this context in Galen.<sup>26</sup> Porphyry replies that at times a philosopher cannot escape the need to develop his own technical language. This can be done either by coining new words or by employing existing words in an extended sense, as has happened in the case of κατηγορία. To this he refers as καταχρησθαι, like ἑλληνίζειν an expression borrowed from the grammarians. It means the transference of a name from an object that is properly named so to an object that lacks a proper name. In the Platonic tradition it is used in the case of calling God, who cannot be named or described, by names that actually refer to other things.<sup>27</sup> Porphyry’s discussion of incorporeals (ἄσώματα) in *Sent.* 42 provides another nice illustration. Porphyry here distinguishes two sorts of incorporeals. On the one hand, some things are called incorporeal because they lack body. This is the proper sense of the word incorporeal (ἄσώματα τὰ μὲν κατὰ στέρησιν σώματος λέγεται καὶ ἐπινοεῖται κυρίως), since it corresponds to the etymology of the word: something that is without (*alpha privans*) a body. These should be distinguished from those things that are called incorporeals καταχρηστικῶς. The latter belong to the intelligible realm and have therefore nothing to do with either place or body, which only exist in the physical realm. Yet even when the philosopher has to develop his own technical language, he should try to stay as close as possible to ordinary Greek as appears from the case of the ἄσώματα and the analysis of the words ἐντελέχεια, κεφαλῶν<sup>28</sup> and κατηγορία which Porphyry in his *Commentary on the Categories* cites as illustrations of philosophical jargon.

<sup>25</sup> Porphyry *In Cat.* 55, 6–7: ὅπερ οὐ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσι τῷδε καλεῖται τῷ ὀνόματι.

<sup>26</sup> See p. 58.

<sup>27</sup> For a definition of κατάχρησις see, e.g., the grammarian Thrypho *Trop.* pp. 192–193 (ed. Spengel, *Rhetores Graeci* III): Κατάχρησις ἐστὶ λέξις μετενηνεγμένη ἀπὸ τοῦ πρώτου κατονομασθέντος κυρίως τε καὶ ἐτύμως ἐφ’ ἕτερον ἀκατονόμαστον κατὰ τὸ οἰκεῖον, οἷον γόνυ καλάμου, καὶ ὀφθαλμὸς ἀμπέλου, καὶ χεῖλος κεραμίου καὶ τράχηλος ὄρους. Proclus *In Parm.* VII 1191, 3–5 uses the term in the case of the names which we ascribe to the One. This typical Platonic use of this term can be traced back to the Middle Platonists, see, e.g., Philo *Mut.* 13.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Cat.* 7a6–22.

In this regard a further observation is called for. A. C. Lloyd has claimed that Porphyry does not pronounce himself on the question of the imposition of names, whether the words of a language were assigned to their objects by nature or by convention.<sup>29</sup> Yet, this is not true. From what we have seen above, it appears that Porphyry, in line with Aristotle, holds that names are purely a matter of convention (συνήθεια). He is even taken to task for this by Iamblichus. In the course of his polemic with Porphyry on theurgy commonly known as *De Mysteries*, Iamblichus lectures Porphyry for holding that names are established by convention (κατὰ συνθήκην κείμενα τὰ ὀνόματα). The latter holds that in the process of naming everything goes: “But the hearer, you say, looks at the meanings (sc. of names), so that it is all about the unchanging notion (ἔννοια), whatever the name may be”. “These things”, Iamblichus tells him, “are not as you suppose that they are”, for “the names of things depend on their natures” (τῇ φύσει συνήρτηται τῶν ὄντων).<sup>30</sup> Below, we shall see that Proclus levels the same criticism against Porphyry.

The whole discussion about using proper Greek may seem to be the provenance of a grammarian rather than that of a philosopher. Yet, it is the overture to a serious philosophical issue, the question to what extent Aristotle’s *Categories* are acceptable to a Platonist. As we mentioned above, Plotinus had criticized Aristotle’s claim in the *Categories* that what is called being (οὐσία) “most strictly, primarily and most of all” is an individual thing, prior to the universal substance. He thus reverses the Platonic order of priority according to which the universal Form is prior to the individual that participates in it. In order to save the *Categories* for Platonism, Porphyry argues that the *Categories* are not “about the things *qua* things at all, but instead about the words that are used to signify things” (*In Cat.* 57, 5–7). Now, since we first perceive sensible things before we come to think of non-sensible things, we shall first name these, and only later the things which we do not perceive straight away, such as intelligibles. Within this perspective, Aristotle can say that what is called substance most strictly is the particular:

**T. 3.7** I shall say that since the subject of the work is significant expressions, and expressions are applied primarily to sensibles—for men first of all assign names to what they know and perceive, and only secondarily to those things that are primary by nature but secondarily to those things

<sup>29</sup> Lloyd 1990: 36–37.

<sup>30</sup> Iamblichus *Myst.* VII 5.

that are primary by nature but secondary with respect to perception—it is reasonable for him to have called the things that are primarily signified by expressions, that is sensibles and individuals, primary substances. Thus with respect to significant expressions sensible individuals are primary substances, but as regards nature, intelligible substances are primary (*In Cat.* 91, 19–25).

Thus, according to Porphyry, the intelligible οὐσία is called after the sensible οὐσία. When we use the word οὐσία to apply to something intelligible, we are actually extending the use of the word, in a manner comparable to the case of the extended use of κατηγορία. This implies that when we discuss metaphysical reality, like for instance intelligible οὐσία, we shall only be talking metaphorically.<sup>31</sup> Most Neoplatonic commentators will adopt this view. Dexippus, e.g., writes in his commentary on the *Categories*:<sup>32</sup>

**T. 3.8** So, since (intelligibles) are ineffable (ἀρρήτων), he (Aristotle, RvdB) uses the name ‘substance’ metaphorically of them (ὥστερ μεταφορᾷ κέχρηται τῷ τῆς οὐσίας ὀνόματι), making them knowable through things sensible and perceived by us. For sensible substance will be homonymous with intelligible substance, representing it only by analogy, but it will be synonymous with physical substance, representing it by its very composition (Dexippus *In Cat.* 41, 25–30; trans. Dillon 1990: 76).

The view of Porphyry and Dexippus is thus diametrically opposed to that of Plotinus who is firmly convinced that language applies primarily to the intelligible.<sup>33</sup> In this respect it is telling that whereas Plotinus applies the method of negative theology exclusively to the One, Porphyry uses it both in the case of the One as well as the case of the intelligible realm.<sup>34</sup>

Not very surprisingly, the role that language plays in Porphyry’s philosophical method differs significantly from the role it plays in that of Plotinus. Like Aristotle, Porphyry believes that sense-perception yields reliable universal concepts regarding the sensible universe. He assumes

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Hadot 1990: 137.

<sup>32</sup> For the intimate relation between Dexippus’ commentary and Porphyry, see Hadot 1990.

<sup>33</sup> For a comparison of Dexippus’ views (**T. 3.8**) and those of Plotinus, cf. Chiaradonna 2002: 263–267.

<sup>34</sup> As observe Hadot 1990: 138 and Chiaradonna 2002: 277. As we shall see in chapter six, pp. 163–168, Proclus, who like Plotinus assumes that names refer first and foremost to the intelligible Forms, discusses in great detail the question at what level of the intelligible realm exactly things cease to be effable.

that we acquire these concepts by separating the immanent form of a thing from its matter.<sup>35</sup> These concepts coincide with the meaning of words. “Words”, he says, “are like messengers that report us about things” (*In Cat.* 58, 23). As we have seen, Aristotle regards the analysis of ordinary language as a first step of a philosophical investigation that should eventually result in a proper scientific definition.<sup>36</sup> Porphyry likewise assumes that we should start our investigation from the so-called ἐννοηματικός λόγος (conceptual definition, i.e. the meaning of a word in ordinary language) and from there move on to the οὐσιώδης λόγος (essential definition, i.e. a scientific, philosophical definition) of a thing.<sup>37</sup> Plotinus, on the contrary, lacks any interest in the analysis of ordinary language, because he takes the intelligible as the starting-point of his investigations.<sup>38</sup>

### 3.2 Porphyry and the *Cratylus*

After what has been said, one wonders what Porphyry made of the *Cratylus* itself. There are indications that Porphyry had some interest in the etymologies from the *Cratylus* as appears, e.g., from this etymology of ἐπιστήμη:

Ἐπιστήμη ὡς εἰς ἐπίστασιν ἄγουσα τὸν νοῦν, φησὶν ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν Κρατύλῳ (P.11, 168F ed. Smith)

This etymology recalls Plato *Crat.* 437a4–5: the name ἐπιστήμη seems to suggest that it stops the movement of our soul towards things (ἔοικε σημαίνοντι ὅτι ἴστησιν ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τοῖς πράγμασι τὴν ψυχὴν).<sup>39</sup> The phrase “φησὶν ὁ Πορφύριος ἐν Κρατύλῳ”, may mean “as says Porphyry in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*”, but as A. Smith 1987: 750 rightly observes, this fragment is too condensed to allow for this conclusion and to affirm with confidence that Porphyry wrote indeed a commentary on

<sup>35</sup> On Porphyry’s theory of abstraction, see Mueller 1990: 478–479 and Chiaradonna forthcoming.

<sup>36</sup> See pp. 24–28.

<sup>37</sup> On this topic, see Kotzia-Panteli 2000, Brittain 2005, esp. pp. 191–196.

<sup>38</sup> I owe this observation to Riccardo Chiaradonna.

<sup>39</sup> The way in which the original etymology has been modified (ψυχὴ, soul, has been replaced by νοῦς, intellect) betrays Neoplatonic influences. For a Neoplatonist, real ἐπιστήμη is the knowledge of the Forms. These are eternally present in νοῦς, which is hence said to stand in itself (ἔστηκεν ἐν αὐτῷ) while being everything, such in contrast to soul. Soul’s discursive knowledge, or rather opinion, δόξα, requires it to move from one object of thought to another while thinking. Cf. Plotinus *Enn.* V 9 [5] 7; cf. V 9 [5] 8, 7–8 with Vorwerk 2001: 126 for further references.

the *Cratylus*. Other references to the etymologies from the *Cratylus* can be found in the remains of Porphyry's *Rhetoric* F 2a ed. Heath (*Crat.* 398d–e the etymology that associates ἥρως with εἶρην and thus with the art of rhetoric) and his *On Know Thyself* which contains an etymology of σωφροσύνη (274F lines 2–6 ed. Smith; cf. *Crat.* 411e–412a).

About Porphyry's work *Περὶ θεῶν ὀνομάτων* we know unfortunately nothing more than its title,<sup>40</sup> but an interesting fragment from *Περὶ ἀγαλμάτων*, a work about the symbolical meaning of the attributes with which sculptors have portrayed the gods, throws some interesting light on Porphyry's etymological activities. In the course of his discussion, Porphyry also turns to the explanations of divine names.<sup>41</sup> I mention this at first sight rather obscure work here not just because of some antiquarian interest but also because Proclus will appear to use it as an argument against Porphyry: if as Porphyry holds, divine names are comparable to divine statues, i.e. representations of the divine, we should assume that at least divine names are natural rather than conventional.<sup>42</sup> Let us now take a closer look at Porphyry's discussions of divine names. He appears to connect these names to processes in the physical world. The name of Attis, for example, the lover of the goddess Cybele who died young and who was generally believed to represent the annual cycle of growing and perishing in nature, is derived from flowers that appear in spring but die without having born fruit. The name of Hera is, to give another example, associated with ἀήρ.<sup>43</sup> (cf. *Crat.* 404c). In doing so Porphyry follows Stoics such as Cornutus, in marked contrast to Proclus who connects his etymologies of divine names primarily to the metaphysical realm, not to the physical world.<sup>44</sup> This fits well with Porphyry's insistence that it is primarily sensible objects that receive names.

It is all the more remarkable, then, to learn that, according to A. Smith again, Porphyry distinguishes in his *On Statues*, "with clear reference to *Cratylus* 401d, two levels of the goddess Hestia: a higher level at which she is equated with οὐσία and is regarded as intelli-

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 361 T. ed. Smith 1988: 435.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* CLXXXI p. 108, 9–12, who, when commenting on the names of Dionysus and Aphrodite connects his interpretation of their names to that of their statues. For a discussion of this passage, see pp. 189–191.

<sup>42</sup> See pp. 110–112.

<sup>43</sup> Attis: P.44, 358F ed. Smith (for the Neoplatonic interpretations of the myth of Attis, see Van den Berg 2001: 171–173); Hera: P. 44, 356F ed. Smith.

<sup>44</sup> For Porphyry's physical allegories, cf. Bidez 1913: 152ff; Courcelle 1948: 172.

gible and then a lower level where she is the overseer of the earth.”<sup>45</sup> P. Hadot too refers to this passage as a testimony for the idea of a first substance, οὐσία, a principle of the being of things in Porphyry.<sup>46</sup> Can this really be true? Porphyry had, after all, arrived at his theory of language in order to be able to argue that from some point of view sensible οὐσία is indeed what we call primarily οὐσία. Let us take a closer look at the fragment that stems from Joannes Lydus. According to him, οἱ φυσικοὶ think that Hestia is the earth, associating it with firmness (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐστάναι)—note that this is Cornutus’ explanation—, whereas οἱ θεολόγοι associate it with being, following a suggestion from the *Cratylus*. He then continues by claiming that according to Porphyry the name Hestia applies homonymously (in the Aristotelian sense) to intelligible οὐσία and the material earth. Joannes next quotes a passage from Porphyry according to which the leading principle of the divine power (ἡ θεία δύναμις) is called Hestia. However, the text from Porphyry as quoted by Joannes contains no indication of two types of Hestia. Eusebius *Praep. Evang.* III 11, 6–7 (= 357aF. ed. Smith) quotes the same fragment and more, yet, this version too presents us with a physical interpretation of Hestia and some other goddesses, not with a theological one. Hestia, the fragment informs us, is the leading principle of the earthly power (ἡ χθονία δύναμις), while Rhea personifies the rocky and mountainous parts of the earth and Demeter the plains, i.e. the fertile parts of the earth. So it appears that Porphyry probably advocated just a physical explanation of Hestia, as one would expect him to do.<sup>47</sup>

In conclusion, it can be said that Porphyry’s position about etymologies, and more especially etymologies of divine names, resembles that of a Middle Platonist such as Plutarch. Porphyry takes them seriously as a source of ancient knowledge which associates the gods with the physical world. Yet, from the examples that we have seen above, it does not seem that Porphyry made much use of the *Cratylus* as an aid to etymologize these names. Apparently the *Cratylus* did not interest him that much, neither for its reflections on the relation of language to philosophy, nor for its etymologies.

<sup>45</sup> Smith 2000: 181–180.

<sup>46</sup> Hadot 1990: 130.

<sup>47</sup> Already Bidez 1913: 146–147 had argued that the interpretation of Hestia as intelligible οὐσία cannot come from *On Statues*.

4. *Iamblichus*4.1 Iamblichus on the *Categories*: the νοερά θεωρία

One later Alexandrian commentator on Aristotle once complained that Iamblichus took his desire to harmonize Plato with Aristotle to such an extreme degree that he even denied that Aristotle opposed the Forms.<sup>48</sup> His remaining work leaves one with the impression that such extreme harmonization was indeed his ambition. As regards our present topic, he continued the work on Aristotle's *Categories* that Porphyry had started and produced a very influential commentary of his own. In it, he appears to have put forward a version of Porphyry's semantic theory adapted to fit the needs of Platonic dialectic. Even though Iamblichus' commentary itself is lost, we are very well informed about its content by later commentators on the *Categories*, and especially by Simplicius. Iamblichus, the latter reports, followed for the most part the large commentary by Porphyry, at times even to the letter. In addition to this, he criticized and elucidated Porphyry, adduced material from the Pythagorean Archytas, and, most importantly, argued that the categories apply not just to the sensible world, but also to the intelligible realm.<sup>49</sup>

This was a novel approach to the *Categories*, clearly at odds with both Plotinus' and Porphyry's thesis that the categories are intended to describe just the sensible world. It is known as Iamblichus' νοερά θεωρία, a mode of interpretation that makes what is said about one level of reality bear on another level.<sup>50</sup> His discussion of the category of being-in-a-position as preserved by Simplicius may serve as an illustration in point. Being-in-a-position, Iamblichus says, is considered in one way in the case of bodies, in another in the case of incorporeal entities like soul, intellect, and god:

**T. 3.9** For indeed the latter (soul) is said to be the place of the reasonings (*logoi*) in it, since it provides a domain for them in order that they may be situated and operate in it. In another sense the intellect is said to be a place for the forms, since it has the same substance as the forms, and

<sup>48</sup> Elias *In Cat.* 123, 1–3, cf. Blumenthal 1997: 8–9.

<sup>49</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 2, 9ff.; on Iamblichus' commentary on the *Categories*, see Dillon 1997.

<sup>50</sup> On Iamblichus' νοερά θεωρία, see Dillon 1997.

contains its thoughts together with the forms within itself. In the strictest sense everything is said to be positioned in god, since all that comes after him is comprehended in him. But perhaps (Iamblichus goes on) it will seem to some that being-in-a-position, thus [said], is being said in many ways, in one way in the case of bodies, and in another way in the case of incorporeals. But that is not so: if one reflects more precisely on the matter, one and the same analogy is observed in the cases of containing and being contained, and in the cases of providing a location and being situated. For the same account of being-in-a-position runs through all of these cases, namely of *one thing being limited within another*, in respect of cause, or potentiality, or operation, or substance, or dimension. A difference [among the cases] comes about in view of the fact that the objects are different and establish their position in relation to different things, but that [difference] does not displace the single account of the [category of] being-in-a-position out of itself (Simplicius *In Cat.* 339, 36–340, 12; trans. Gaskin 2000: 71–72).

The differences between Iamblichus and Porphyry are striking. As we have seen, Porphyry in general holds that a word in its strict sense refers to something sensible (**T. 3.7**). More in particular, he denies that intelligibles can be in a place.<sup>51</sup> The category of being-in-a-place applies solely to corporeal things. Here, Iamblichus, on the contrary, maintains that ‘being-in-a-position’ in the strictest sense (κυριώτατα) refers to god. Moreover, both Porphyry and Plotinus had argued that when the same expression is applied both to the sensible and intelligible realm, it is done so homonymously, i.e. the same expression covers two different descriptions. Iamblichus, however, claims that the same account of being-in-a-place applies both to (sensible) bodies and (intelligible) incorporeals.<sup>52</sup> What makes the difference are the realities to which these names are applied. Thus the account (λόγος) of being-in-a-position is the same both for sensible and intelligible realities, i.e. “one thing being limited within another”. However, in the case of sensible entities this means something different from the case of intelligible entities, since in the case of the latter one object cannot physically encompass another. Likewise, according to Simplicius *In Cat.* 363, 9–14, Iamblichus explicitly denies that the occurrences of the category of place at the various levels of reality relate to each other homonymously, but claims that

<sup>51</sup> See p. 70.

<sup>52</sup> On Iamblichus’ denial that the categories apply homonymously to the sensible and intelligible world, see Luna 1990.



they are related in accordance with the very definition of the genus.<sup>53</sup> The genus meant here is the intelligible genus,<sup>54</sup> just as in **T. 3.9** place in the strictest sense is said of the relation of everything to god. He continues: “For there is a single relation of contained things towards containing things, which is the same everywhere, but varying according to the different subsistent realities of the participating things: for there is one variety [of this relation] in the case of bodies and another which applies to incorporeals”<sup>55</sup>

I assume that Iamblichus’ *voεpà θεωρία* of the *Categories* was part of his attempts to harmonize Plato and Aristotle. For as we shall see in the next paragraph, Iamblichus did not just comment on the *Categories*, he had also studied the *Cratylus*. He thus had to find a way to bring together the *Categories*, according to which words refer to the sensible realm and the *Cratylus* according to which words refer primarily to the intelligible realm. Whereas Plotinus and Porphyry felt obliged to make a choice, Iamblichus wants to have his cake and eat it. According to this *voεpà θεωρία*, words in their strictest sense refer to the intelligible realm. However, they are equally fit for describing the sensible realm, be it that in both cases they will have a different sense because intelligible entities differ from sensible ones. This approach was not going to be popular. As we shall see, many followed Porphyry, and some, including Proclus, Plotinus, but nobody seems to have taken up Iamblichus’ position.

#### 4.2 Iamblichus on the *Cratylus*

About Iamblichus’ precise views on the *Cratylus* we know little. From the complete lack of indications to the contrary it seems likely that Iamblichus never produced a commentary on the dialogue himself.<sup>56</sup> Yet, he thought the dialogue important enough to incorporate it in his standard curriculum of twelve dialogues that an aspiring Platonist had to

<sup>53</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 363, 9–11: δεῖ οὖν, φησὶν ὁ Ἰάμβλῑχος, ἐπιδιατεῖναι ἐφ’ ὅλα τὰ ὁπωσοῦν ὄντα ὡς ἕτερα ἐν ἐτέροις τὴν ὅλην τοῦ τόπου φύσιν, οὐχ ὁμωνύμως ἀλλὰ κατ’ αὐτὸν τὸν τοῦ γένους λόγον.

<sup>54</sup> On genus as intelligible genus, cf. Simplicius *In Cat.* 53, 11–12.

<sup>55</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 363, 11–14; trans. Gaskin 2000: 97.

<sup>56</sup> In this regard, it is sometimes pointed out that Proclus *In Crat.* CVI p. 56, 13–23 refers to an interpretation of the name Τιτάν by both Iamblichus and Amelius (cf., e.g., Dalsgaard Larsen 1972 vol. I p. 353 and Dillon 1973: 22). Yet, as Dillon rightly observes, this passage is not necessarily proof of a commentary. All the more so, we may add, because the name Τιτάν does not appear in the *Cratylus*.

study. According to the anonymous *Prolegomena in Platonis Philosophiam*,<sup>57</sup> which contains the fullest version of this list, the *Cratylus* was to be read relatively early on in the curriculum. It marked the beginning of the study of reality, of τὰ ὄντα, after an introductory stage that aimed at preparing the student for this study. It is said to “teach about τὰ ὀνόματα”, so that we can deduce that it was supposed to study reality through the names of things.

This conjecture is supported by a remark by Hierocles, a student of Plutarch of Athens, active in the first part of the first half of the fifth century C.E., in his commentary on the Pythagorean *Carmen Aureum*. In one passage (*In CA XXV*), which is clearly based on a Neoplatonic exegesis of the *Cratylus*, Hierocles offers an account of how names were produced by the wise man of old (τοὺς πρώτους θεμένους τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα διὰ σοφίας ὑπερβολήν): they contemplated the intelligible, which resulted in thoughts in the soul that were images of the intelligible Forms. These thoughts they turned into spoken language, i.e. into names that are themselves symbols and images of these thoughts (σύμβολα τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ νοήσεων), and hence indirectly images of the intelligible Forms (εἰκόνας τῶν νοηθέντων πραγμάτων). Those who rightly understand these names are consequently referred back to the Forms. Hierocles remarks: “And so the end of their contemplation became for us the starting-point for the discovery of the intellection of the things”.<sup>58</sup> Proclus says something similar in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*: “through them (i.e. the names of things), Plato stretches out towards the things.”<sup>59</sup> Here, the lasting influence of the Middle Platonic reading makes itself felt. No matter that Plato had intended the *Cratylus* as a warning against attempts to study things through their names, the Neoplatonists, just like the Middle Platonists before them did exactly this.

When we return for the moment to Iamblichus, we find that the only passage in his remaining works that, however faintly, may recall the *Cratylus* is his discussion of divine names in *Myst.* VII 4–5. As we have seen above, he holds it against Porphyry that the latter maintains that names are just a matter of convention. Instead he claims that they

<sup>57</sup> Cf. *Prolegomena* X 26, 34–39 ed. Westerink 1990. The references to the curriculum have been collected by Festugière 1969.

<sup>58</sup> For a translation of and commentary on this passage, see Schibli 2002: 302–304.

<sup>59</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* IX p. 3, 24.

depend on the nature of the beings (*Myst.* VII 5: τῇ φύσει συνήρτηται τῶν ὄντων). This squares nicely with what we have just seen, i.e. that in the Iamblichean reading program the study of things starts with the *Cratylus*. However, in *Myst.* VII Iamblichus continues by developing a theory of the superiority of barbaric divine names in rituals that is in keeping with some generally accepted magical views<sup>60</sup> but that, at first sight at least, seems to go against the grain of the *Cratylus*. As will be remembered, Socrates in the *Cratylus* makes the bold claim that barbarian names may be equally correct as Greek ones. From this remark, Platonists such as Plutarch and Porphyry concluded that barbaric names of the gods are equal to those of the Greeks. Iamblichus, on the other hand, holds that the barbarian divine names are superior to those in use among the Greeks. Yet, this need not be as irreconcilable with the content of the *Cratylus* as may first seem. Plato, after all, does not tell us that all languages *are* in fact equally correct, just that there is no reason to assume that on principle Greek is superior to barbarian languages. It is interesting that Iamblichus' reason to fault the Greek divine names is very Platonic. He finds them lacking in being true to the nature of their objects, the gods. For the latter are characterized by their stable nature: they are unchanging Beings in the Platonic sense. In keeping with this, some barbarian peoples have preserved the divine names of their languages unchanged, i.e. they have not added or taken away anything from the old formulas. The Greeks, however, Iamblichus complains, are by nature restless innovators who cannot let things just be as they are but feel a constant urge to change them. Their permanently changing divine names thus do not correctly represent the fixed nature of the gods.<sup>61</sup> Iamblichus might have found corroboration for this linguistic vice of the Greeks in *Crat.* 414c4ff. where Socrates complains that the Greeks in their desire to embellish language, started to add and take away letters from the original words for the sake of euphony (περιτιθέντων γράμματα καὶ ἐξαιρούντων

---

<sup>60</sup> Magical papyri testify of the belief in the power of barbaric names as do the *Chaldaean Oracles*—an expression of, in the words of J. Dillon, the Platonic underworld—which warn “Not to change the barbarian names” (Fr. 150). Iamblichus was not the only intellectual to take these magical theories aboard, as can be seen from the case of the church father Origen *Contra Celsum* I 24–25, who too combines a Platonic semantic theory with magical lore. On the relation between Origen, Iamblichus and magical papyri, see Dillon 1985; for an analysis of the passage from Origen, see also Van den Berg 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Iamblichus *Myst.* VII 5.

εὐστομίας ἔνεκα), thus corrupting the originally correctly given names. If this discussion does indeed throw some light on Iamblichus as a reader of the *Cratylus*, it will be of interest to see that Proclus, who is equally committed to theurgy as Iamblichus, will in his *Commentary on the Cratylus* take an altogether different line. It is not just that he maintains that every people should worship its gods in its own language, but also that he maintains that the Greeks do not constantly change their divine names: since the gods are themselves unchanging beings, so are their names. In fact, he makes the stability of the divine names into his most important argument for the thesis of the natural correctness of names against Aristotelian conventionalism.<sup>62</sup>

## 5. *Proclus*

### 5.1 Proclus and the rejection of the Porphyrian semantic theory (*In Parm.* IV 849, 16–853, 12)

Contrary to Porphyry and Iamblichus, Syrianus, and in his footsteps his student Proclus, did not feel the urge to harmonize Plato with Aristotle.<sup>63</sup> Rather to the contrary, they tended to stress the differences between the two. It is thus that we find Proclus in *In Parm.* IV 849, 16–853, 12 training his guns on Porphyry's Aristotelian semantic theory, while in the process also tearing apart Iamblichus' νοερά θεωρία.

In *Parm.* 130e5–131a2 Parmenides had asked young Socrates whether he believed that there are certain Forms, of which the particulars here partake and get their names (τὰς ἐπωνυμίας αὐτῶν). Proclus praises the statement that the Forms have given their being as well as their names to the things in this world as a remark of genius and worthy of Platonic principles. Proclus now enters into a lengthy explanation of why this is so. He starts by opposing those who hold that names are purely a matter of convention<sup>64</sup> to those who hold that they are in a way natural:

<sup>62</sup> See pp. 114–118.

<sup>63</sup> For Syrianus' and Proclus' critical attitude to Aristotle, see further especially pp. 103–106 below.

<sup>64</sup> *In Parm.* IV 849, 20: θέσει τὰ ὀνόματα μόνον εἶναι. Proclus' view on the matter is rather nuanced: he does not deny that there is something conventional about names, just that they are completely conventional, see, e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* X p. 4, 6–24; XII p. 5, 1–4.

**T. 3.10** [t]hey grant the many the authority to impose names and assert that names have their origin in perceptible things; for these, being before everybody's eyes, are the first to have received specific names, and from them, by use of certain analogies, the wiser men set names for invisible realities.<sup>65</sup> Thus if they should call both god and this perceptible thing here 'living being',<sup>66</sup> then the perceptible thing will have the name primarily and god will have it derivatively, as a result of our transferring the name to him by analogy, and it will not matter whether we call the sensible thing 'living being'<sup>67</sup> or by any other name that we choose to put upon it, even as a certain man once imposed upon his slaves the names of certain conjunctions (*In Parm.* IV 849, 19–33).<sup>68</sup>

This passage strongly recalls Porphyry's semantic theory. It grants the many the authority to impose names<sup>69</sup> (cf. Porphyry's idea about ἐλλήνίζειν: ordinary language is the norm). It holds that language refers primarily to the sensible things because they are more familiar to us, even though intelligible entities (like e.g. god) are ontologically speaking prior. These are named after the sensible things by 'wiser men' (cf. Porphyry on κατὰχρησις). Finally, in the process of naming everything goes: there are no objective rules for correct naming, as was famously illustrated by Diodorus Cronus ('a certain man'), when he baptized one of his slaves Ἀλλὰ μὴν (cf. Iamblichus' criticism of Porphyry in *Myst.* VII).<sup>70</sup>

<sup>65</sup> 'Invisible realities', a tacit and correct emendation by Morrow-Dillon of ἐμφανέσιν οὐσίαις (ed. Cousin).

<sup>66</sup> Reading, as C. Steel suggests to me, εἰ οὖν καὶ ὁ θεὸς λέγοιτο ζῶον αἰδίδιον παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῦτ' ὁ αἰσθητὸν instead of εἰ οὖν καὶ ὁ θεὸς λέγοιτο ζῶον αἰδίδιον παρ' αὐτοῖς, καὶ τοῦτ' ἐστὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν (ed. Cousin).

<sup>67</sup> Morrow-Dillon translate "and it will not matter whether we call god (τοῦτο) 'living being'". Two considerations, however, go against this translation: (1) τοῦτο ('the one here in front of us') suggests that Proclus has the sensible living being in mind, not god to which he refers as ἐκεῖνο ('the one up there'), as is customary in Neoplatonic writings (cf. the immediately preceeding phrase εἰ οὖν καὶ ὁ θεὸς λέγοιτο ζῶον αἰδίδιον παρ' αὐτοῖς καὶ τοῦτ' ὁ αἰσθητὸν, τοῦτο μὲν πρῶτως ἔξει τὴν τοιαύτην προσηγορίαν, ἐκεῖνο δὲ δευτέρως); (2) the imposition of names of invisible entities does not happen at random, but takes some thinking, as I explain above.

<sup>68</sup> Translations from Proclus *In Parm.* are after Morrow-Dillon 1987.

<sup>69</sup> Οὗτοι καὶ τῆς θέσεως τοὺς πολλοὺς κυρίους ἐποίησαν. Morrow-Dillon 1987: 219 translate "they make the the multitude responsible for the conventional usage" but this translation seems to miss the point.

<sup>70</sup> On Diodorus Cronus (2nd half of the 4th century–early 3th century B.C.), see Muller 1994: 779–781; about this story in particular, see Döring 1972, Fr. 112 (= Ammonius *In Int.* 38, 17–20), Fr. 113 (= Simplicius *In Cat.* 27, 15–24), cf. Fr. 114 (= Stephanus *In Int.* 9, 20–24) and the remarks on pp. 128–129.

Proclus opposes this position to that of those who think that names are images of their objects, i.e. that the names of the things have been assigned to them in accordance with their nature. They are like statues (ἀγάλματα) of their objects imitating them “by means of the meaning of their elements (τὰς τῶν στοιχείων δυνάμεις), the combination of these (τὴν σύνθεσιν αὐτῶν), and their number (ἀριθμόν).”<sup>71</sup> The “meaning of the elements” and the combination of these refer to Socrates’ theory of linguistic elements (*Crat.* 424b10: τὰ στοιχεῖα) that imitate qualities, e.g., the ρ expresses movement (*Crat.* 426c1–3). Several of these elements may be combined into one word in order to imitate the various qualities of that thing.<sup>72</sup> Plato does not discuss the mimetic quality of number. Proclus may have the kind of arithmetical analysis in mind that were practiced by Platonists such as Theodore of Asine, who made use of the fact that Greek letters can also be used as numerals.<sup>73</sup> Those who believe that names are such, will leave the invention of names to the experts, “as Socrates says in the *Cratylus* when he makes the names the task of the dialectician, and makes use name refer primarily to the immaterial Forms, and secondarily to sensible things”.<sup>74</sup> The reason why, according to Proclus, names refer primarily to the immaterial Forms, and not to sensible things as Porphyry and others have it, is that we can know these better (μᾶλλον γινώσκειν) and hence name them better.<sup>75</sup> Names, according to Socrates in the *Cratylus*, are after all expressions of the knowledge of the name-giver, whereas it is not possible to have precise knowledge of the sensibles. Proclus’ reason why we may not know the sensibles is not, as one may perhaps expect after having read the *Cratylus*, that these are constantly changing, but rather that whereas the immaterial Forms are purely what they are,<sup>76</sup> material sensibles, since they are mixed up with a lot of other things, are not. So, while Porphyry had argued that it is only logical to assume that names refer primarily to perceptible things since these are prior and more familiar to us, even though the universal Forms may be more prior

<sup>71</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 849, 33–850, 5.

<sup>72</sup> *Crat.* 427c8–d1: ἐκ δὲ τούτων τὰ λοιπὰ ἤδη αὐτοῖς τούτοις συντιθέναι ἀπομυούμενος.

<sup>73</sup> On Theodorus of Asine complicated analysis of words, see Proclus *In Tim.* II 274, 10–278, 25 and the discussion of this passage by Gersh 1978: 289–307.

<sup>74</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 850, 6–11.

<sup>75</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 850, 11–16.

<sup>76</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 850, 13–14: ἀκριβῶς ὄντα ἃ ἐστί.

*simpliciter*, Proclus now responds that even though it may thus seem that the sensible things are easier to know, in fact they are not.

Proclus illustrates his point by means of the examples of ‘equal’, ‘fire’, and ‘man’. The first is taken from Plato *Phd.* 74a–d, where Socrates points out to Simmias and Cebes that equal sticks and stones are never entirely equal, so that we have to assume that our knowledge of equality derives from the Form Equal itself, which is always equal. What we mean by ‘equal’, then, is first and foremost the true equality of the unchanging Form Equal, not the concept of equality which we derive from unequal equal sticks and stones. The example of fire is taken from Plato *Ti.* 49d–e, where Plato explains that since we see that material things, such as fire, are constantly changing, we should not call them a ‘this’ (τοῦτο), but a ‘what is of such and such a quality’ (τὸ τοιοῦτον). Interestingly, the example of ‘man’ finally, may also be found in Plotinus *On the Kinds of Being* (*Enn.* VI 3 [44] 9, 30–31). There, Plotinus, recalling the passage from the *Timaeus*, turns the Aristotelian view upside down: Aristotle was wrong to call the sensible thing the true substance, the τὸδε τι, and the universal term the τοιόνδε.<sup>77</sup> Porphyry, as one expects, claims, *pace* Plotinus, precisely this.<sup>78</sup>

Now that Proclus has laid down the claim that ὀνόματα refer primarily to the Forms and only secondarily to the material participants, he brings up the question whether this is a case of homonymy or synonymy.

**T. 3.11** Many have thought that Plato applies (κατηγορεῖν) the same names both to intelligibles and to sensibles, according to some synonymously, according to others homonymously. *My* opinion is that he is using them homonymously, though in a different way from that which they suppose. For ‘man’ is not homonymous in the sense of a bare name applied to two different things, but as being primarily a likeness of the intelligible reality, and secondarily of the sensible thing; for this reason man is not the same thing when we are speaking of the intelligible as when we refer to the sensible man (Proclus *In Parm.* IV 851, 21–31).

Synonymy means applying one and the same name to two different things in the same sense, e.g., applying the name ‘human being’ in the sense of ‘rational animal’ to both Socrates and Plato.<sup>79</sup> As we

<sup>77</sup> On this passage, cf. Chiaradonna 2004: 21.

<sup>78</sup> Cf., e.g., Porphyry *In Cat.* 91, 2–4.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Cat.* 1a6–8 (trans. Ackrill): “when things have the name in common and the definition of being which corresponds to the name is the same, they are called synonymous. Thus, for example both a man and an ox are animals” (note, though,

have seen, both Plotinus and Porphyry assume that we use names homonymously when we refer to an intelligible and a sensible entity by the same name, since in these cases we do not use these names in the same sense. Iamblichus, on the other hand, had denied this, without committing himself to synonymy. Proclus agrees with Plotinus up to a point. Like Plotinus, the Athenian Neoplatonists postulate a special type of homonymy in the case of the relation between the intelligible Forms and their sensible participants. The sensible participant is called after its Form even though it is something different from that Form since it derives its nature from that Form.<sup>80</sup>

However, Proclus next qualifies his agreement. The existence of homonymy had been used by some as an argument against the claim that names are 'by nature' in the Platonic sense. For, if names are images or statues of their objects, how does one explain that one name aptly imitates two different things? Proclus was well aware of this argument, which he discusses in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*.<sup>81</sup> Proclus replies that in cases of homonymy the name is only seemingly the same. Suppose, thus Proclus, that a man who has had a vision of the goddess Athena as she is described in Homer, would paint her. And suppose furthermore that another man who had seen the famous statue of Athena by Pheidias, would paint a picture after that statue. Then, if both would depict Athena in the same posture, there would seem, to the superficial observer at least, to be no difference at all. Yet, on closer inspection, the one made after the image of Athena herself will make a special impression, whereas the painting after the statue will carry only a frigid likeness, since it is the picture of a lifeless object.<sup>82</sup>

---

that Aristotle there talks about beings that are synonymous, not the synonymous use of names as is the case here).

<sup>80</sup> On Syrianus on homonymy and Forms, see the detailed discussion by Opsomer 2004.

<sup>81</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* XVI p. 6, 21–23, discussed at pp. 103–106 below; cf. the answer by Dexippus in his commentary on the *Categories* on the question why the Pythagorean Archytas abstains from discussing things like homonymy, synonymy etc.: these things are not in accord with Pythagorean principles, "for since they lay down that names are attached to things by nature, they deny all anomaly in language" (Dexippus *In Cat.* 17, 1–3; trans. Dillon 1990: 39).

<sup>82</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 851, 32–852, 11. For the special impression that such a statue could make, cf. an anecdote from Damascius *Vita Isidori* 87 ed. Zintzen who describes how, upon seeing a statue of Aphrodite, he "fell into a sweat through the influence of divine terror and astonishment and my soul was filled with such joy that I was quite unable to go back home" (trans. Athanassiadi). The reference to Pheidias recalls



The same goes for names, as Proclus explains by means of an example from the *Phaedrus* where Plato offers two different etymologies of the name Ἔρως. In the case of the divine one, the name is derived from περωτός (being winged), since it elevates the soul to the intelligible realm (*Phdr.* 252 b ff.), in the case of physical Ἔρως it is derived from ῥώμη, the force of physical desire (*Phdr.* 238 c). So what seems to be one name, are in fact two different names.

So far, Proclus has not demonstrated what is wrong with the Porphyrian view apart from the fact that it runs counter to Platonic orthodoxy. He now argues against it by analyzing what actually happens when we give names to things. Porphyry's sketch of the rise of language had suggested that we use names to refer to sensible objects. Proclus posits that in general we use names "because we want to indicate the distinguished notions about the things (διὰ τῶν ὀνομάτων τὰς διακεκριμένας περὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐννοίας)".<sup>83</sup> When we use, e.g., the name 'equal', the notion that we have in mind is that of pure equality, not of something that is both equal and unequal. As we have just seen, so-called equal sensible objects are also in many ways unequal. Therefore, Proclus argues, "the names that we use will be suitable primarily to Forms, not to things that contain a considerable mixture of opposites, such as...equal with unequal and the like".<sup>84</sup>

Proclus thus follows Plotinus in claiming that names refer primarily to the intelligible Forms and not to their sensible participants. In the case of Plotinus, his semantic theory went hand in hand with his epistemology. He assumed that knowledge of the Forms is possible because a part of our soul always remains at the level of the divine Intellect. Proclus firmly rejects this thesis.<sup>85</sup> Yet, he too assumes that we

---

Plotinus *Enn.* V 8 [31] 1, 32–40: one should not despise the arts (τέχναι) because they imitate sensible things, themselves copies of the Forms. In fact, good art does not take these things as its model but superior forming principles (λόγοι). "For Pheidias too did not make his Zeus from any model perceived by the senses, but understood what Zeus would look like if he wanted to make himself visible" (trans. Armstrong). Proclus refers to Pheidias' statue of Athena instead of that of Zeus possibly because he had a special relationship with this goddess and her statue. Marinus *Proclus* § 30 reports that when the statue of Athena that until that time had stood in the Parthenon was taken away, Athena appeared in a dream to Proclus and announced that from now on she wished to live with Proclus. The statue was probably that of Athena Promachos, see ed. Saffrey-Segonds 2001: 164 n. 15.

<sup>83</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 852, 20–22.

<sup>84</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* IV 852, 23–27.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* III 333, 28 ff., discussed in Van den Berg 1997.

can have knowledge of the Forms, be it not of the intelligible Forms themselves, but of our own innate copies of these, which he calls οὐσιώδεις λόγοι and which are the objects of discursive thought.<sup>86</sup> Proclus calls these λόγοι (reasons) οὐσιώδεις (essential) because they constitute the essence (οὐσία) of the human soul.<sup>87</sup>—C. Steel hence suggests the translation ‘essential reasons’.<sup>88</sup>—Therefore, whether we are aware of it or not, we always carry these around with us. If we want to grasp reality, there is no need for us to study the *phainomena* and the concepts that we derive from these, as Porphyry suggests. All we have to do is to examine and articulate our very own essential reasons which are always at our disposition.

As we have seen, Plotinus, since he assumes that knowledge of the metaphysical causes of the universe is possible, prefers a top-down approach of philosophy. Whereas Porphyry and many others try to harmonize Aristotle with Plato, Plotinus finds fault with the Stagirite because he fails to take these causes into account. Because of this approach Plotinus is not very much interested in the analysis of ordinary language, which is after all about the sensible universe. Such in contrast to Porphyry, who believes that we should start a philosophical inquiry from the ἐννοηματικὸς λόγος (conceptual definition) that is contained in ordinary language and from there move on to the οὐσιώδης λόγος (essential definition) of a thing. Proclus adopts Plotinus’ methodology. An illustration in point is his discussion of time in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*. At the beginning of this commentary, he lays down the general principle of his philosophy of nature. The physical world has to be studied first and foremost as the product of metaphysical causes. Proclus blames Aristotle for not taking these metaphysical causes into account. The latter explains all physical things from matter instead.<sup>89</sup> Proclus’ subsequent discussion of time is informed by this principle. He starts this discussion by briefly looking at the ordinary concepts of time and eternity. He explains that the majority of men (οἱ πολλοὶ τῶν

<sup>86</sup> Discursive thought thus plays a far more important role in the epistemology of Proclus than in that of Plotinus, which also explains why Proclus appears to be far more interested in language than Plotinus (cf. p. 00 above).

<sup>87</sup> Proclus thus uses the term οὐσιώδης λόγος in a different manner as compared to Porphyry (see p. 73 above).

<sup>88</sup> For an illuminating treatment of these ‘essential reasons’ and their role in Proclus’ philosophy, see further Steel 1997a.

<sup>89</sup> For Proclus’ views on physics as a study of the metaphysical causes of the universe and his criticism of Aristotle for failing to do so, see Steel 2003b.

ἀνθρώπων) have the notion that time is “something of movement”, like number from observing the movements of physical bodies and more in particular the heavenly bodies. The more subtle (οἱ περιττότεροι) among these continued to consider eternity. They observed that the movements of the universe repeat themselves forever identically. From this they deduced that there had to be an eternal and unmoved cause of these movements. Hence people normally derive the word χρόνος (time) from χορεία (i.e. the dance of the planets), a type of movement, and αἰών (eternity) from τὸ ἀεὶ εἶναι (being always, i.e. not moving or changing).<sup>90</sup> Thus, these people developed their concepts and the corresponding names in the way that Porphyry had described in **T. 3.6**: they started with what could immediately be perceived (the movement of the heavenly bodies). From these observations the intellectuals next developed a notion of something that could not be perceived, i.e. eternity. Aristotle built on these ordinary concepts, famously positing that time is the number of movement.<sup>91</sup> Proclus, however, finds fault with this approach. Following in the footsteps of Plato, we should try to pinpoint their exact location in the intelligible realm.<sup>92</sup> He thus clearly favors the top-down approach. After a long discussion, including a demonstration of what is wrong with Aristotle’s definition of time,<sup>93</sup> Proclus finally believes to have established that time is not primarily a quality of the physical world, but that it belongs to the level of Intellect. Proclus corroborates his thesis by etymologizing the word χρόνος again. He rejects the ‘folk-etymology’ as misleading. The word χρόνος does not refer primarily to the dance of the heavenly bodies, but to the dance of intellect (χρόνος > χορόνοος > χορέυων νοῦς) instead.<sup>94</sup> Thus, Proclus observes, the explication of the name testifies of the correctness of his thesis, since it shows that his own views are in agreement with the superior intuition of the namegiver.<sup>95</sup> As we shall see below, Proclus in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* will insist on the fact that we are only capable of correctly etymologizing a word once we have grasped the nature of the thing that the word is supposed to express.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* III 8, 18–9, 21.

<sup>91</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* III 9, 23–10, 2.

<sup>92</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* III 10, 2–8.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* III 20, 1–21, 6.

<sup>94</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* III 28, 1–7.

<sup>95</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* III 29, 12–14: καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἀνάπτυξιν μόνην ἐπιμαρτύρει, δι’ ἧς ὁμογνωμονοῦν σοὶ καὶ τὸ τῶν ὀνοματοθετῶν ἐπιβολώτατον ἐπιδείξει.

<sup>96</sup> See pp. 180–184 below.

Proclus' semantic theory is not just a consequence of his philosophy, his philosophy also demands such a theory. As we have seen, the result of Porphyry's and Dexippus' semantic theory was that all our discourse on metaphysics is metaphorical. If this were true, one may well wonder what would be left of the Platonic philosophical enterprise. Plato in the *Parmenides* had demanded that philosophical thought had to be about definite Forms with a clear and unchanging character of their own. If one denies this, he had said, one "will completely destroy the power of all dialectical discourse".<sup>97</sup> Proclus, when commenting on this passage, rephrased this warning as follows: "We shall then be abolishing the whole of dialectic if we do not admit the existence of οὐσιώδεις λόγοι in souls".<sup>98</sup> In chapter five, we shall see in greater detail that Proclus believes that the connection between Forms and names is essential to Platonic dialectic.<sup>99</sup>

## 5.2 Proclus on ἐλληνίζειν (*In Alc.* 258, 21–259, 21)

Now that the differences between Porphyry's semantic theory and that of Proclus have become evident, it is time to compare Porphyry and Proclus on style. The first one concerns the demand of ἐλληνίζειν, which, as we have seen, assumes that ordinary language is normative. This is at odds with the *Cratylus*, which hails the philosopher as the authority in linguistic matters. Because of his superior understanding of reality, the Platonic philosopher is in a position to tell what a word really means, even when the average speaker of Greek uses it in a completely different sense.<sup>100</sup> Proclus' discussion of the concept of ἐλληνίζειν in his commentary on the *Alcibiades* provides an interesting, if somewhat unexpected, illustration of this Platonic approach to semantics: instead of simply rejecting ἐλληνίζειν all together as a misguided demand, Proclus gives it a new meaning in keeping with his Platonic semantics.

In *Alc.* 111a1–4, Alcibiades claims that one can learn serious things from the man in the street such as ἐλληνίζειν, i.e. 'to speak Greek'. Proclus comments that speaking Greek is not something simple,

<sup>97</sup> *Parm.* 135c1 f.: καὶ οὕτως τὴν τοῦ διαλέγεσθαι δύναμιν παντάπασι διαφθερεῖ.

<sup>98</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* V 982, 19–21: Πᾶσαν ἄρα τὴν διαλεκτικὴν ἀναιρήσομεν εἰ μὴ προσησόμεθα τοὺς οὐσιώδεις λόγους τῶν ψυχῶν.

<sup>99</sup> See pp. 135–139.

<sup>100</sup> See chapter one § 3.3.

but threefold.<sup>101</sup> He then proceeds to describe the three senses of ἐλληνίζειν:

1. “to observe the Greek ordinary use of words (τὴν ἑλληνικὴν διασώζειν συνήθειαν τῶν ὀνομάτων), for example, this thing here (τῷδι) is called ‘wood’, this ‘man’, this other ‘horse’, and so forth for everything”.
2. “to be accurate in the use of Greek language and to observe its correct form in pronunciation”.
3. “to assign the proper uses of the terms that are naturally appropriate to their subjects” (τρίτον δέ ἐστι τὸ τὰς κυριότητας τῶν ὀνομάτων τὰς κατὰ φύσιν προσηκούσας τοῖς πράγμασιν ἀπονέμειν).

The first sense of ἐλληνίζειν corresponds to the way in which Porphyry uses the word: it is a matter of sticking to ordinary usage (συνήθεια) and is concerned with sensible individual things such as individual pieces of wood, horses and persons.<sup>102</sup> It is precisely because of the fact that this form of ἐλληνίζειν consists in ordinary usage that ordinary man is the appropriate teacher of it.

Passing over the second sense of ἐλληνίζειν, which is the territory of the grammarian, we come to a third type which corresponds to the correct names from the *Cratylus*. This is the work of “the man who has examined the nature of things, i.e. the philosopher”. We turn to such a knowledgeable specialist when we find that the understanding of the ordinary people is too weak to grasp τὰ ὄντα, the true Beings or Forms. In support of this explanation of ἐλληνίζειν, Proclus quotes a Pythagorean *akousma*: “the wisest of all the things that are is number; second in the point of wisdom is to assign appropriate names to things”. Proclus continues by interpreting number as Intellect (Νοῦς), whereas name-giving is the work of the intelligent soul which contemplates the Forms that constitute Intellect. Proclus discusses this *akousma* in greater detail in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, and we shall postpone a more detailed discussion of it until then.<sup>103</sup>

One final remark about Proclus’ discussion of ἐλληνίζειν: Porphyry had insisted on it, in the sense of using ordinary Greek, for the sake

<sup>101</sup> Proclus *In Alc.* 258, 21–259, 21; trans. after O’Neill 1971: 169–171.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. **T. 3.6** above.

<sup>103</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* XVI p. 5, 27–6, 19.

of clarity. To Proclus clarity is not necessarily a virtue. A Platonic philosopher discusses things unknown to the general public. The particular way in which a Platonic philosopher uses language may trouble an ordinary speaker of Greek. Plato in the *Parmenides* had already observed that to the many dialectic is “idle talk” (ἀδολεσχία).<sup>104</sup> Proclus comments<sup>105</sup> that even though the many may call it thus, it is in fact the salvation of the human soul. He seizes the opportunity to deliver a damning remark—which he will repeat in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*<sup>106</sup>—on Aristotelian logic, putting it down as “empty argumentations and logical methods (ἐπιχειρήμασι ψιλοῖς καὶ λογικαῖς μεθόδοις). For such a system as that is actually admired by the many”, whereas dialectic is unpleasant to them “by reason of the fact that it is unfamiliar (ἄσυνήθη) and says nothing clear (μηδὲν σαφές) to them”. So much then for συνηθεία and clarity as virtues of philosophical style.

## 6. Conclusions

Porphyry’s semantic theory was the dominant one in late Antiquity. Its popularity can easily be explained from the tendency among a majority of the Neoplatonists to accommodate Aristotle in their system, and more in particular his logical works, which were considered as a useful supplement to Plato’s inspired dialogues. However, these logical works are in fact an exposition of Aristotle’s philosophical methods. An essential aspect of Aristotle’s methodology is that we start our investigations from the sensible particulars. Even though these may not be prior ontologically speaking, they are prior to us. Therefore it is much easier for us to know these than the universals. Within such a system, words are, not surprisingly, primarily understood as expressions of concepts based on sense-perception. If so, ordinary language is unsuited to discuss Platonic metaphysics. Porphyry and his followers were prepared to pay that price: our discussions of the intelligible realm are metaphorical. On the positive side, analysis of ordinary language provides a good starting-point of a philosophical investigation.

A minority of the Neoplatonists, including Plotinus and Proclus, objected to Aristotle’s approach. According to them, we should start

<sup>104</sup> Plato *Parm.* 135d5

<sup>105</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* V 990, 1–17.

<sup>106</sup> See chapter 5 § 2.

top down from the intelligible causes of the sensible universe, the Forms. A philosophy that failed to do so could never be expected to yield an adequate description of the world, as the many shortcomings of Aristotle's system demonstrated. On their view, the ontologically prior Forms are also prior to us, in one way or another, provided that we take the trouble to focus on them. The semantic theory from the *Cratylus*, according to which names reflect dialectician's knowledge of the Forms, suited them much better. Thus, in a way it was only to be expected that the *Cratylus* was relatively ignored by most Neoplatonists since they followed Porphyry. Nor does it come as a surprise that Proclus signed for the only ancient commentary on the *Cratylus*. The next three chapters will focus on that commentary. It will appear that all the key-issues of this chapter such as the relation between Plato's semantic theory and that of Aristotle, the relation between names of particulars and Forms, and the role of etymology in philosophical discourse, will also play a prominent part in the *Commentary*, thus adding detail to Proclus' theory about language.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PROCLUS' *COMMENTARY ON THE CRATYLUS* (I): THE ISSUE OF THE CORRECTNESS OF NAMES

#### 1. *Introduction*

In the next three chapters we shall take a closer look at Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*. The work has so far scarcely profited from the recent upsurge of interest in Proclus.<sup>1</sup> Those few scholars who have paid attention to the *Commentary* tend to regard it as a lucky dip from which one may pick up interesting bits and pieces in order to reconstruct aspects of Proclus' theory of language. In doing so, they disregard the context from which these passages were lifted. While it may be true that the ancient commentators went well beyond merely elucidating the text under discussion in that they used the commentary format to develop their own views and that it thus makes sense to speak of "the philosophy of the commentators", it is, I feel, important to keep in mind that these texts are commentaries all the same. In order to fully appreciate what is said by a commentator it is important to read what he says against the backdrop of the text on which he is commenting. For whatever degree of freedom the ancient commentators may have allowed themselves, what they say is in the end to no small extent determined by their source texts. Therefore, my intention in these chapters will be to bring out the main features of Proclus' interpretation of the *Cratylus*. This may seem an easy enough job, but in fact it is not, because of the specific nature of the *Commentary on the Cratylus*.

---

<sup>1</sup> The standard edition of Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* is Pasquali 1908. It has been translated into Italian by Romano 1989 and into Spanish by Álvarez Hoz & Gabilondo & García 1999. An English translation by B. Duvick has been published in R. Sorabji's *Ancient Commentators on Aristotle* series (Duvick 2007). I have profited, and occasionally borrowed, from an unpublished version of the latter translation, which the author kindly put at my disposal. Studies on (aspects of) Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* include Trouillard 1975; Hirschle 1979; Romano 1987; Sheppard 1987; Ritoré Ponce 1992a; Abbate 2001.



2. *Proclus' notes on the Cratylus*

Any reader accustomed to Proclus' carefully and elegantly composed commentaries and treatises who comes to the *Commentary on the Cratylus* for the first time is likely to feel disappointed: the most extensive discussion of the *Cratylus* from Antiquity appears to consist of a series of garbled notes. Even though they apparently follow the text of the *Cratylus*, it is by no means always clear how exactly they relate to the *Cratylus* or to each other. The commentary breaks off mid-sentence in the discussion of the name of the goddess Athena (cf. *Crat.* 407a8–c2). In fact, the title *Commentary on the Cratylus* is misleading and for clarity's sake it would perhaps be better to stick to the title that we find in the MSS: ΕΚ ΤΩΝ ΤΟΥ ΦΙΛΟΣΟΦΟΥ ΠΡΟΚΛΟΥ ΣΧΟΛΙΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΡΑΤΥΛΟΝ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΟΣ ΕΚΛΟΓΑΙ ΧΡΗΣΙΜΟΙ. The commentary thus consists of 'useful excerpts' (χρήσιμοι ἐκλογαί) from notes (σχόλια) taken by a student who attended Proclus' seminar on the *Cratylus*.<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason that the vast majority, around 90 %, of notes start with ὅτι, i.e. "[Proclus says] that ...".<sup>3</sup> Both the identity of the student who took the notes and that of the compiler of the present selection—if these are two different persons at all—will probably remain unknown forever. Pasquali notes that in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* neuter plural subjects very frequently agree with their verbs, whereas in Proclus' other commentaries they hardly do.<sup>4</sup> He calls attention to the fact that same agreement of plural subjects and their verbs also occurs in the commentaries produced by Ammonius and his students. To my mind this shows at best that the text of the *Commentary on the Cratylus* was not written down by the same person who committed the other commentaries to writing.<sup>5</sup> It does not necessarily indicate that the former belonged to the circle of Ammonius. Even if he did, his affiliation does

<sup>2</sup> On σχόλια, see Lamberz 1987: 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Romano 1987: 113. I do not believe that the absence of ὅτι in the remaining 10 % of the cases necessarily indicates that these notes are not by Proclus. Many cases concern questions, which can hardly be introduced by ὅτι. Likewise, in Damascius' *Commentary on the Phaedo*, which too consists of a series of notes most of which begin with ὅτι, ὅτι is absent in the case of questions, see, e.g., *In Phd.* I § 10, 15, 19 and *passim*. The reporter may also decide to insert a little monograph by his professor that exceeds the length of the average note and that is not preceded by ὅτι, see, e.g., Damascius *In Phd.* §§ I 207–252, a monograph on the argument from opposites in the *Phaedo*, which may be compared to Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI, a monograph on divine names.

<sup>4</sup> Pasquali 1908: vi–vii.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the remark to that extent by Pasquali 1908: VI.

not appear from the content of the commentary. As we shall see, the commentary systematically opposes Aristotle's views to those of Plato and severely criticizes these. This hostile attitude towards the Stagirite is very characteristic of the Athenian Neoplatonists, but very unlike Ammonius and his school. More in general, from the fact that the commentary has a clear structure and unity, serious interference on the part of an anonymous editor seems unlikely.

The structure of the commentary can be summarized as follows:

- i. the prolegomena to the commentary;
- ii. the part of the commentary that covers the discussion with Hermogenes;
- iii. Proclus' treatment of the etymologies of divine names.<sup>6</sup>

The prolegomena consist of a set of questions with which Neoplatonic commentaries as a rule begin their commentaries. These deal with such issues as the σκοπός of the work, its 'character', and the interpretation of the role of the *dramatis personae* of the dialogue.<sup>7</sup> These prolegomena already provide us with the essentials of Proclus' interpretation of the *Cratylus*. At the heart of it lies, as we shall see, Proclus' conviction that the views of Hermogenes and Cratylus concerning the correctness of language are not contradictory but complementary.

Proclus assumes that Socrates' refutation of Hermogenes' thesis that names have a conventional correctness only, consists in three arguments in ascending order of importance against the thesis that the correctness of names is purely conventional. Proclus identifies Hermogenes' position with that of Aristotle, and systematically turns these into arguments against Aristotle's semantic theory, thus giving air to his anti-Aristotelianism.

Proclus next uses Socrates' account of how the dialectician and the name-giver produce naturally correct names to explore the metaphysical dimensions of the act of name-giving. The human dialectician and name-giver, it appears, imitate the activities of gods. The ability of the human soul to give naturally correct names thus hints at its

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Álvarez Hoz *et al.* 1999: 35–46 who distinguish three parts: i. Prooemium (*In Crat.* I–XXI); ii. Correctness of the names that depend on generation (*In Crat.* XXII–LXIX); iii. Names of the gods (*In Crat.* LXX–CLXXXV).

<sup>7</sup> On these prolegomena, see the exhaustive study by Mansfeld 1994, esp. pp. 28–37 for Proclus' commentaries on Plato (and p. 34 for the *Commentary on the Cratylus*).

divine powers. In this way the *Cratylus* reveals us something about ourselves.

From the foregoing discussion Proclus concludes that there exist naturally correct names. He thus takes the etymological section seriously and tries to interpret the etymologies of divine names in such a way that they are consistent with his own Neoplatonic theology.

In this chapter, I shall primarily focus on the topic of the correctness of names and the manner in which it is treated in what is roughly the first part of the commentary. In the next chapter, I shall focus on correct name-giving and dialectic and what it tells us about the human soul. In chapter six, finally, I shall investigate Proclus' use of the etymologies from the *Cratylus*. Since Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* has hardly been studied in detail, I shall in dealing with these topics pay much attention to the details of Proclus' arguments. In this way I shall combine a detailed study of Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* and his interpretation of the dialogue with a more thematic treatment.

### 3. *The σκοπός (In Crat. I): the correctness of names and the human soul*

Iamblichus had famously posited that each Platonic dialogue has one central σκοπός or aim, which unifies its various parts into an organic whole. We do not know what he made of the σκοπός of the *Cratylus*, even though he must have given the matter some thought. He had after all included the dialogue on his list of twelve dialogues that became the standard core curriculum of late Neo-Platonism. About Proclus' own views we are much better informed, for he discusses the σκοπός of the *Cratylus* right at the beginning of his commentary, as one might well expect him to do.

**T. 4.1** Ὁ σκοπὸς τοῦ Κρατύλου τὴν ἐν ἐσχάτοις ἐπιδείξει τῶν ψυχῶν γόνιμον ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν ἀφομοιωτικὴν δύναμιν, ἣν κατ' οὐσίαν λαχοῦσαι διὰ τῆς τῶν ὀνομάτων ὀρθότητος αὐτὴν ἐπιδείκνυνται. ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἡ μεριστὴ τῶν ψυχῶν ἐνέργεια διαμαρτάνει πολλαχοῦ τῶν οἰκείων τελῶν, καθάπερ δὴ καὶ ἡ μερικὴ φύσις, χώραν εἰκότως ἔχει καὶ τὰ ἀόριστα καὶ τύχῃ καὶ αὐτομάτως περιφερόμενα ὀνόματα, καὶ οὐ πάντα τῆς νοερᾶς ἐπιστήμης ἐστὶν ἔκγονα καὶ τῆς πρὸς τὰ πράγματα συγγενείας στοχάζεται (*In Crat.* I p. 1, 1–9).

The aim of the *Cratylus* is to demonstrate the generative activity and assimilative power of souls at the lowest levels of reality. They demonstrate this power, which they have as part of their nature, through the correctness of the names [that they give].

But since, on many occasions, the divisible activity of souls fails its proper ends, just as particular nature does, it is reasonable to allow for names which are undefined and which circulate by chance and spontaneously too, and to assume that not all names are the offspring of intellectual knowledge and aim at kinship to the things.

The first thing that catches the eye is that Proclus interprets the *Cratylus* not as a dialogue about language but as a *psychological* dialogue. He assumes that Plato's aim with the *Cratylus* is to make us discover something about ourselves, about certain powers and activities of our souls by studying the issue of the correctness of names.<sup>8</sup> Our ability to coin correct names reveals the generative activity and assimilative power of the human soul. Proclus has here naturally correct names in mind, for he says that these are the "offspring of intellectual knowledge", i.e. they are based on our knowledge of metaphysical entities and aim at the "kinship to the things", i.e. they strive to be like the things to which they refer.

This is in line with Proclus' quarrel with Porphyry in his *Commentary on the Parmenides* about the question whether names are by nature or by convention. In his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, however, Proclus admits that not all names are correct by nature. On the one hand, this is due to the divided activity of our souls.<sup>9</sup> Our souls do not always function as they should. Instead of dedicating themselves completely to philosophical speculation of intelligible reality, their proper end, they are often distracted by the material universe. Because of this, they will not always base the names that they give on the knowledge that results from philosophical speculation. This happens especially, Proclus says in the *Commentary on the Parmenides*, when we leave naming to the unphilosophical masses. Proclus compares this failure to make correct names to the fact that particular nature repeatedly fails to do what it

---

<sup>8</sup> The phrase "at the lowest levels of reality" indicates that Proclus here has the embodied souls in mind, as opposed to more divine types of souls who may be found at higher levels of reality. For the expression ἐν ἐσχάτοις, cf., e.g., *El.* prop. 140, p. 125, 1–3: the powers of the gods taking their origin above proceed to "the lowest levels of reality, i.e. the terrestrial regions (μέχρι τῶν ἐσχάτων καθήκουσι καὶ τῶν περὶ γῆν τόπων).

<sup>9</sup> Cf., e.g., Proclus *In Parm.* IV 864, 23–28: the human soul may be divided into various powers of apprehension. How we apprehend reality depends on the power that is active (Καθ' ὁποίαν γὰρ ἂν ἐνεργῇ τις δύναμιν, τοιαύτην ὑπολαμβάνει καὶ τὴν φύσιν τῶν ὄντων). If this power happens to be sense-perception we shall apprehend the nature of things as divisible and enmattered, not as indivisible, i.e. we shall only apprehend things as particulars, but we shall fail to notice their universal cause. According to Proclus, this is precisely where Hermogenes goes wrong, see pp. 98–102 below.

should. Later on in the *Commentary* (*In Crat.* LXXXVIII), Proclus will work out the relation between failed names and failed products of nature in greater detail.<sup>10</sup>

4. *Two characters: two classes of things, two types of names*  
(*In Crat.* X–XIV)

4.1 Socrates as umpire (*In Crat.* X)

Leaving for the moment Proclus' discussion of the logical character of the dialogue aside, we next come to another standard element of the prolegomena of a Neoplatonic commentary, the discussion of the characters (πρόσωπα) of the dialogue, Cratylus, Hermogenes, and Socrates and the roles that they play. They are, of course, interpreted in the light of the σκοπός.<sup>11</sup> *In Crat.* X is a sizable trunk of such a discussion and will thus serve as our starting point. It reads:

**T. 4.2** That now (*Crat.* 383a) the characters (πρόσωπα) are presented: Cratylus the Heraclitean—of whom Plato too was a student—who said that all names are by nature (φύσει), for those that are not by nature are not names at all, just as we say that a liar does not say anything; furthermore Hermogenes the Socratic, who on the contrary said that no name whatsoever is by nature, but that all names are by imposition (θέσει). And thirdly, there is Socrates, who, judging the matter (ἐπικρίνας), demonstrated that some of the names are by nature, and others by imposition, as if they had come into existence by chance.

For the names in the case of eternal beings (ἐπὶ τοῖς αἰδιότοις) rather partake in nature, whereas the names in the case of perishable things (ἐπὶ τοῖς φθαρτοῖς) rather partake in chance. For the man who called his own child 'Athanasius' exposes the failure of the names of the latter.

Furthermore, names have form and matter, and as far as the form is concerned, they participate more in nature, whereas as far as the matter is concerned, they participate more in imposition.

And when talking to Hermogenes he distinguishes between the names that are firmly established among the gods, such as 'MURINE' and the like, and those among souls, such as 'BATIEIA'. In his conversation with Cratylus, on the other hand, he accepts that names refer back to their objects, but he demonstrates that there is also a strong element of chance

<sup>10</sup> See pp. 127–128. The expression 'particular nature' (ἡ μερικὴ φύσις) occurs only twice in Proclus: here and in *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 44, 5–8, where Proclus opposes it to complete nature ἡ ὅλη φύσις, which rectifies failures on the part of particular nature.

<sup>11</sup> On the (allegorical) interpretation of the *dramatis personae* (*In Crat.* X p. 4, 6: πρόσωπα) in ancient commentaries, cf. Mansfeld 1994: 12 n. 7.

in names, and at the same time that not all objects are moving (*In Crat.* X p. 4, 6–24).

Anyone acquainted with the many modern studies on the *Cratylus* that try to establish whose side Plato is really on, that of Hermogenes or Cratylus, will not fail to notice that Proclus does not present the two positions as mutual exclusive. Such an approach would have been foreign to Proclus' conviction that all elements of the dialogue work towards a single aim. He assumes that the positions of Hermogenes and Cratylus' complement each other. They need Socrates as some sort of judge or umpire (διαιτήσας, the exact term will be of importance in what follows below) to make them aware of that fact.<sup>12</sup>

This interpretation of Socrates as a judge reflects the way in which the Athenian Neoplatonists approached philosophical questions. As is well known, already Plato and especially Aristotle had practiced philosophy by means of puzzles or ἀπορίαι. The Athenian Neoplatonists adopted this as one of their methods of doing philosophy. In their view, the aporetic method consisted in examining an issue by comparing two opposite views like an impartial umpire (δαιτητής). Syrianus, for instance, comments on the most famous collection of *aporiai* in Antiquity, Aristotle *Metaph.* B as follows:

**T. 4.3** On the basis of these considerations, he (Aristotle) shows that it befits the philosopher to raise puzzles, in order that, having *become some sort of impartial and unbiased umpire of opposing arguments*, he selects the one most in harmony with the true doctrine (Syrianus *In Metaph.* p. 81, 14–16 ed. Kroll).<sup>13</sup>

Socrates “acting like an umpire (διαιτήσας) divides the things in a scientific manner”, distinguishing between eternal and perishable objects.<sup>14</sup> To these two classes of things correspond two types of names. The former are by nature, the latter by imposition. As the example of the man who calls his mortal child Athanasius indicates,<sup>15</sup> Proclus derives

<sup>12</sup> Cf. also Proclus *In Crat.* XIII p. 5, 5–10 for Socrates as umpire.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of this passage, see D’Ancona 2000 esp. p. 313 whose article informs my discussion. For other examples from the Athenian school of philosophers creating an *aporia* and then setting themselves up as an umpire of the two opposing arguments, see, e.g., Proclus *In Parm.* VII 1174, 20–27; Damascius *Pr.* I 17 p. 75, 17–76, 2 ed. Westerink-Combès.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* XIII p. 5, 5–10.

<sup>15</sup> The name ‘Athanasius’ as an example of an ill-suited name recurs in Proclus *In Crat.* LI p. 18, 25, this time together with the names ‘Ambrosius’ and ‘Poluchronius’. Hirschle 1979: 10 n. 19 observes that ‘Ambrosius’ and ‘Athanasius’ are well-known Christian names, and that therefore these examples are probably an anti-Christian jibe.

this distinction between two classes of objects and two corresponding types of names from Plato *Crat.* 397a5–397c1. There, Socrates suggests to Hermogenes that they should better leave aside the names of heroes and human beings, like ‘Eutuxides’, ‘Sosias’ and ‘Theophilus’. His argument for doing so is that parents do not try to give their children appropriate names. Normally, children are named after their ancestors or they are given names that express some kind of wish. These names are therefore not very likely to be naturally correct and Socrates thus turns his investigations to the names of τὰ ἀεὶ ὄντα καὶ πεφυκότα, “the eternal beings that are by nature”, instead.

What makes perishable things different from eternal ones is that we can only have real, i.e. unchanging, permanent, knowledge of eternal beings. Since correct names are supposed to express the name-giver’s knowledge of the nature of things, only the names of eternal beings can be (naturally) correct. Proclus had already hinted at this in his discussion of the σκοπός, where he distinguished between names that are the product of knowledge and those that circulate ‘by chance’. It is also no coincidence that in **T. 4.2** Proclus talks about τὰ αἰδία and τὰ φθαρτά. It is, of course, only a small step from τὰ ἀεὶ ὄντα καὶ πεφυκότα in the *Cratylus* to τὰ αἰδία, but there is more to it. The pair τὰ φθαρτά / τὰ αἰδία is not found in Plato. Yet, it is standard Neoplatonic terminology that goes back on Aristotle, who had observed that in the case of the φθαρτά, there is neither demonstration by means of syllogism, nor ἐπιστήμη, as opposed to the case of the αἰδία.<sup>16</sup>

Names of individuals are thus a matter of chance (τύχη). Proclus derives the term chance from Socrates’ remark that Orestes owed his fitting name either to chance or to some poet, a passage that we shall discuss in more detail below.<sup>17</sup> In the present context, it suffices to note that when he comments on this passage, Proclus starts with the now familiar division between two types of names: those that belong to the eternal things “and that have clearly been established in accordance with

---

This may well be so, but note that these names are also very appropriate illustrations of ill-fitting names for perishable things. The same distinction between the correctly established names of eternal gods and the names given by chance to perishable men can be found in Hierocles *In CA* XXV.

<sup>16</sup> Arist. *APo.* 75b24: οὐκ ἔστιν ἄρα ἀπόδειξις τῶν φθαρτῶν οὐδ’ ἐπιστήμη ἀπλῶς.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Plato *Crat.* 394e8–11.

science” (κατ’ ἐπιστήμην) and those names that belong to the perishable things.<sup>18</sup> Agamemnon could not possibly have known the future life of his son. For, Proclus explains, physiognomy, i.e. the art of predicting somebody’s character from looking at his facial characteristics etc., yields only vague conclusions, “especially in the case of newborns”.<sup>19</sup> Such a remark may amuse us, but it brings home the essential point: there are things that we can know in a scientific manner and hence name correctly, and things that we can neither know in such a manner nor name correctly.

#### 4.2 Cratylus and Hermogenes: science and opinion

Like modern students of Plato, Proclus assumes that form follows content. In corroboration of his interpretation of the roles that Cratylus and Hermogenes play in the argument, Proclus calls attention to the way in which Plato introduces Cratylus and Hermogenes at the beginning of the dialogue is a good illustration in point. It is intended as corroboration of his interpretation of the positions of Cratylus and Hermogenes that we have just studied.

The first word spoken to Cratylus, βούλει, thus Proclus, already indicates that he is a scientific (ἐπιστημονικός) person.<sup>20</sup> For, Proclus adds somewhat cryptically, ‘will’ (βούλησις) is for good things only.<sup>21</sup> A passage from the discussion in *In Parm.* IV about naming<sup>22</sup> helps to clarify this remark:

**T. 4.4** And if we suppose that the multitude, and not the wise, are the legislators of names, Plato would say of them as of those persons in the *Gorgias* (467a ff.) who “don’t do what they want (ἃ μὴ βούλονται)”,<sup>23</sup> that they assign names as they seem best to them (ἃ δοκεῖ), not as they want (ἃ βούλονται) (*In Parm.* IV 852, 27–32; trans. after Morrow-Dillon 1987: 221).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 42, 27–43, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 43, 4–5.

<sup>20</sup> In fact, this is even the first word of the entire dialogue: Βούλει οὖν καὶ Σωκράτει τῷδε ἀνακοινώσωμεθα τὸν λόγον (*Crat.* 383a1–2).

<sup>21</sup> *In Crat.* XIV p. 5, 11–17 and 21–22 for the explanation of why is the mark of a scientific mind.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. chapter three § 5.1 above.

<sup>23</sup> Reading ἃ μὴ βούλονται (as C. Steel kindly suggested to me), instead of ἃ βούλονται Cousin.



Thus Cratylus as a scientist holds that things have objective essences of their own and that names should bring these out.<sup>24</sup> As far as naming is concerned, his interest is not in whatever name that may please us, but only in names that are objectively good. Sadly enough for Cratylus, he is not a very good scientist. He is of course wrong in his Heracleitean belief that everything is in flux. If Socrates does not treat Cratylus too harshly, Proclus comments elsewhere, it is because a philosopher has better things to do than waist his time on puffed up Heracleiteans.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, his extreme scientific outlook blinds him to the fact that not all things are objects of scientific knowledge.

Hermogenes, on the other hand, belongs to those people “who assign names as seems best to them (ἃ δοκεῖ)”. He is a δοξαστικός person, a man who is easily influenced by whatever δοξά comes along. The first words addressed to him in the dialogue hint at this: ‘εἴ σοι δοκεῖ’ (*Crat.* 383a3).<sup>26</sup> All he sees is the endless variety of particular things, which can only be the object of δοξά, not of ἐπιστήμη.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, he denies that there is such a thing as naturally correct names.

<sup>24</sup> Cf., e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* XVII esp. p. 7, 22 (names as images of objects) and 8, 1–4 (Cratylus believes that the production of these images requires scientific knowledge). On this passage see further pp. 106–109 below.

<sup>25</sup> See, e.g., *In Crat.* X p. 4, 23–4 (Cratylus wrongly believes that everything is in flux) and *In Crat.* XXII (the true philosopher does not want to waist his time on these people).

<sup>26</sup> See *In Crat.* XIV p. 5, 17–20. Modern scholarship too pays attention to the portrayal of Hermogenes as a man occupied with δοξά, see, e.g., Baxter 1992: 17–18, who, too, draws attention to the first words of Hermogenes in the dialogue.

<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* XXX p. 11, 1f.: Hermogenes “only sees the particulars (τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα), but fails to regard the eternal things”; see *In Crat.* XXXIII p. 11, 21–22 for the fact that particulars cannot be the object of science, only of δοξά (διὰ τὸ ἀόριστον εἶναι τὸ τῶν καθ’ ἕκαστα τυχαίων καὶ ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης προαιρούμενον καὶ δοκοῦν); the philosopher, on the other hand, does not care for the particulars, but only for the universal (cf. *In Crat.* XXIX p. 10, 20–22). For the identification of Hermogenes with δοξά, cf. also Proclus *In Crat.* LXVII p. 29, 6–12 commenting on Plato *Crat.* 391b9–c5: Hermogenes is analogous to “irrational δοξά that desires the good”, whereas his brother Callias, who spent his money on sophists like Protagoras represents bodily and material φαντασία (apparently because of his money), since δοξά and φαντασία are kindred faculties of the soul. It is interesting to note that Socrates is considered to be analogous to intellect, νοῦς. The reason for this is, I assume, that it takes someone who knows the real objects of name giving, the Forms, to understand the true nature of naming. Cf. Proclus *In Parm.* I 628, 19–30 for a comparable interpretation of Socrates as *nous*, since he sees the Forms and declares them to others.

5. *A historical excursus* (In Crat. XVI–XVII)

In *Crat.* XVI–XVII Proclus places the issue of the correctness of names in a historical perspective. In doing so, he adopts a well-tried method of philosophical investigation. Already Aristotle had mined the philosophical traditions in search for opposing arguments in order to construct their *aporiai*, acting as an “umpire of opposing arguments” (T. 4.3). The Athenian Neoplatonists, at their turn, proceeded likewise. This method even determined their attitude towards Aristotle as such. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Athenian Neoplatonists were well aware that Aristotle clashed with Plato on many occasions. They interpreted these clashes as aporetic puzzles about which they had to pronounce judgement. Syrianus, who appears to have played a crucial role in the development of this strategy, says about it this at the beginning of his commentary on the *Metaphysics*:

**T. 4.5** When someone wants to call us ... an umpire (δῆταις) between the simpler and more intellectual intellections of the epoptic contemplation of the followers of Pythagoras and the more logical puzzles raised against these by the one who in this field is the strongest of those who have ever studied it, Aristotle, we shall not try to escape the imposition of this name (Syrianus *In Metaph.* p. 81, 9–13 ed. Kroll).<sup>28</sup>

The ‘followers of Pythagoras’ here represent the divinely inspired Platonic tradition that was believed to originate from Pythagoras. They are here opposed to the logical Aristotle. When we now turn to the historical excursus in the *Commentary of the Cratylus*, we find that Proclus likewise acts as an umpire who judges the doctrines about names of various philosophers, which he connects to the positions represented by Hermogenes and Cratylus.

Among the philosophers who, like Cratylus in the dialogue, claim that names are by nature, Proclus mentions Pythagoras and Epicurus.<sup>29</sup> The latter two make an odd couple and Proclus will later on explain that Epicurus’ sense of ‘by nature’ differs from that of Pythagoras. Proclus

<sup>28</sup> On what this passage tells us about the attitude of the Athenian school towards Aristotle, see Saffrey 1990 (1987) and D’Ancona 2000. For Aristotle’s own account of the aporetic method, see the excellent discussion in Politis 2004: 64–75.

<sup>29</sup> *In Crat.* XVI p. 5, 25–26.

reconstructs Pythagoras' view by interpreting the Pythagorean *akousma* that we have already come across in the *Commentary on the Alcibiades*:<sup>30</sup>

**T. 4.6** For Pythagoras, when asked what is the wisest of all things, said “Number”. “And what comes second in wisdom?” “He who gave the things their names.” And through “number” he hinted at the intelligible cosmos that contains the multitude of intellectual Forms.<sup>31</sup> ... And just as over there the intelligible, the Intellect (*Nous*) and intellection are one and the same, in the same manner are number and wisdom the same over there. And through ‘the name-giver’ he hinted at Soul, which exists as a product of *Nous*. And Soul is not the things themselves in the primary manner in which *Nous* is these, but it has images of these and discursive λόγοι οὐσιώδεις, statues of the beings (viz. Forms) as it were; likewise names imitate the intellectual Forms, i.e. the Numbers. ... Therefore, Pythagoras says, naming is not the task of just anybody, but of the one who focuses on the intellect and the nature of the beings. Therefore names are by nature (*In Crat.* XVI pp. 5, 27–6, 19).

So, according to this passage, the Pythagorean number refers to the realm of the Platonic Forms and the divine Intellect (*Nous*). Intellect coincides with its intellections, the Forms. Soul emanates from Intellect. As we have seen in chapter three, Soul does not contain the Forms properly speaking, but images of these, the λόγοι οὐσιώδεις. Since correct names are images of these, they are indirect imitations of the Forms themselves. Needless to say that this passage tells us more about Proclus' views on names than about those of the historical Pythagoras.

As for Hermogenes' position that names are just a matter of convention, Proclus assumes that this corresponds to the views of Aristotle and the atomist Democritus.<sup>32</sup> The latter, Proclus informs us, devised a set of four possible arguments in support of the convention hypothesis (Proclus *In Crat.* XVI pp. 6, 20–7, 17):<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Apart from *In Alc.* 259, discussed in chapter three § 5.2, Proclus also refers to the same *akousma* in *In Tim.* I 276, 16 ff.; The *akousma* is further mentioned by Iamblichus *VP* 82.

<sup>31</sup> The identification of Platonic Forms with Pythagorean Numbers can be dated back to the earliest days of the Academy, as can be glanced from, e.g., Aristotle *Meta.* 987b7–13 and was propagated by Plato's own pupils like Xenocrates (cf., e.g., Kahn 2001: 62).

<sup>32</sup> *In Crat.* XVI p. 5, 26–27.

<sup>33</sup> For a thorough discussion of this section, see Ademollo 2003.

1. An argument based on ὁμωνυμία, i.e. different things bearing the same name: if a name naturally suits one thing, how can it also suit an altogether different thing?
2. An argument based on πολωνυμία, i.e. one and the same thing having different names. What Democritus meant by it is by no means certain, but the Neoplatonists understand it in the following way: if names resemble their objects like images, one would assume that any object has one name, just as all images of a person look more or less the same.
3. An argument based on μετάθεσις: why are names changed—, e.g., from ‘Aristocles’ into ‘Plato’ and from ‘Tyrtaeus’ into ‘Theophrastus’—if names belong naturally to their objects?
4. An argument based on the ἡ τῶν ὁμοίων ἔλλειψις (deficiency of similars): if names are natural, how is it possible that we derive, e.g., the verb φρονεῖν from the noun φρόνησις, but that a similar derivation from the noun δικαιοσύνη is absent?

Proclus was not the first to discuss Democritus’ arguments for he relies of the counterarguments of τινες (*In Crat.* XVI p. 7, 6) to contradict Democritus:

1. What seems to be the same name is in fact two names, e.g. the word ἔρως has been derived from ῥώμη when it denotes physical love and from περόεις when it denotes the philosophical love of beauty (cf. Plato *Phdr.* 238c and 252b–c).
2. The different names of one and the same thing refer to different aspects of that thing, e.g. ἀνθρωπος from τὸ ἀναθρεῖν ἃ ὅπωπεν (‘to inspect what one has seen’) refers to man’s inquiring nature (cf. *Crat.* 399c), whereas μέρος from τὸ μεμερισμένην ἔχειν ζῶην (‘to inspect what one has seen’) refers to the fragmented state of his soul.
3. The very fact that we change names shows that some names are according to the nature of the bearer and others contrary to it and hence need to be changed.<sup>34</sup>
4. Some now deficient forms of words did originally exist but have gone missing over time.

---

<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, Sedley 2003: 21–23, with a reference to Proclus *In Crat.* XVIII, points out that the story of Plato changing his name is an indication that he took the natural correctness of names as presented in the *Cratylus* seriously.

The identification of Democritus' position with that of Aristotle and that of Hermogenes plays an important role in Proclus' dealings with the issue of the correctness of names. As we have already seen, Proclus in his refutation of Porphyry's Aristotelian semantic theory in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* (chapter three § 5.1), avails himself of counterarguments one and two. More important still is the fact that this identification helps us to appreciate a somewhat curious element of Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*: the sustained attacks on Aristotle. Since Hermogenes in fact represents Aristotle, any blow dealt to Hermogenes' thesis is at the same time one dealt to Aristotle. And indeed, we shall find later on in this chapter that the points that Proclus believes Socrates to score against Hermogenes are translated into refutations of remarks by Aristotle on the nature of names in *De Interpretatione*. Thus one may say that Socrates, the impartial umpire who judges the merits of Hermogenes' arguments against Cratylus' position is analogous to the Neoplatonic philosopher Proclus who examines the merits of Aristotle's position against that of Pythagoras.

#### 6. *Epicurus and the two meanings of φύσει* (In Crat. XVII)

As we just mentioned, Proclus in *In Crat.* XVI groups Cratylus together with Pythagoras and Epicurus. This does not mean that he fails to notice that the natural correctness of names discussed in the *Cratylus* is something altogether different from Epicurus' theory of the natural origin of language. In *In Crat.* XVII, some sort of appendix to his historical excursus in *In Crat.* XVI, he goes to some length to dispel any possible confusion about the various senses in which things can be said to be φύσει.<sup>35</sup> He distinguishes the following four cases of being φύσει, those of

<sup>35</sup> *In Crat.* XVII pp. 7, 18–22: "Ὅτι τὸ φύσει τετραχῶς·

ἢ γὰρ ὥς αἱ τῶν ζώων καὶ φυτῶν οὐσίαι ὕλαι τε καὶ τὰ μέρη αὐτῶν·

ἢ <ὥς> αἱ τούτων ἐνέργειαι καὶ δυνάμεις, ὥς ἡ τοῦ πυρὸς κουφότης καὶ θερμότης·

ἢ ὥς αἱ σκιαὶ καὶ αἱ ἐμφάσεις ἐν τοῖς κατόπτροις·

ἢ ὥς αἱ τεχνηταὶ εἰκόνες εἰκνύϊαι τοῖς ἀρχετύποις ἐαυτῶν.

- (1) complete plants and animals or parts of these;<sup>36</sup>
- (2) activities and powers of these, e.g. the lightness and heat of fire;
- (3) shadows or reflections in mirrors;
- (4) artificial images which resemble their archetypes.

Proclus derives the first two types of “being by nature” from Aristotle *Ph.* B 1 where Aristotle discusses the ways in which the term φύσει is used. Aristotle defines φύσις in terms of an innate cause of movement: “nature is a principle or cause of being moved (κινεῖσθαι) and of being at rest in that to which it belongs primarily, in virtue of itself and not accidentally” (*Ph.* B 1, 192b20–23; trans. Hardie and Gay).<sup>37</sup> Aristotle thus applies the term primarily to animals and plants and their parts or to simple bodies (earth, fire, air, water). Secondly, the term κατὰ φύσιν, according to Aristotle, also applies to the attributes that belong to these because of what they are, for example the property of fire to be carried upwards.

According to Proclus, however, there is also another, Platonic, sense of φύσει: that of images that are after nature.<sup>38</sup> Proclus distinguishes between two types of images: spontaneously generated images and artificially created images. Proclus derives this subdivision from Plato *R.* X where Socrates distinguishes two ways in which a craftsman (δημιουργός) may produce things. He may either simply get hold of a mirror and carry it around, thus producing reflections of whatever he happens to come across (*R.* 596d7–e2), or he may produce something after a Form, e.g. a carpenter may produce a bed after the Form bed.<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> The excerptor has probably omitted a third instance of these natural things. As we shall see, Proclus here follows Arist. *Ph.* B 1 who in addition to the plants and animals and parts of these also adds simple bodies like earth, water, fire, and air to the list of natural things of the first type. From the fact that Proclus refers to the lightness of fire as an example of the natural powers of the natural things when discussing the second sense of ‘being by nature’, it seems likely that in his original discussion he had mentioned these simple bodies as well.

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle opposes nature to other causes of movement. Themistius comments that these are τέχνη, τύχη, and προαίρεσις (cf. Ross 1936: 499, referring to Themistius *In Arist. Phys. Paraphrasis* 35, 6). As we have seen, Proclus considers these three factors to be the driving forces behind naming and indeed it will appear that he does not hold names to be natural in the Aristotelian sense.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Proclus’ criticism of Aristotle’s claim that *logoi* are meaningful by convention not by nature in *In Crat.* XLIX, to be discussed below, see p. 123).

<sup>39</sup> Same division in Proclus *In Tim.* I 342, 20–344, 24 where the perceptible copies of Forms (hence Aristotle’s natural things) are said to be products of nature, which should be distinguished from natural imitations (shadows and the like, I assume) and

Given that Proclus takes the craft of making names and its δημιουργός very seriously in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, this passage from the *Republic* must have seem particularly relevant to him.

Epicurus, thus Proclus, holds that names are ‘by nature’ in the Aristotelian sense. Echoing the Aristotelian definition of nature as an innate cause of movement, Epicurus is said to have hold that people are “naturally moved” (φυσικῶς κινούμενοι) to produce language, just as in the case of such naturals sounds like “coughing, sneezing, mooing, barking and sighing”. These names were thus imposed “without knowledge”.<sup>40</sup> Proclus contrasts Epicurus’ theory of natural names to that of Cratylus, by pointing out that Cratylus holds that each thing has its proper name since it was imposed properly by the first name-givers “with skill and knowledge.”<sup>41</sup> Cratylus is after all, has we have seen above, characterized in the dialogue as a scientific person.<sup>42</sup>

Socrates too, when he says that names are ‘by nature’, means ‘by nature’ in the fourth sense. Names are “the offspring of thought and of knowledge”, “of the human soul that uses its imagination”, not of some natural urge. Socrates is thus in agreement with Cratylus on this issue, be it with one, important, qualification. Whereas Cratylus holds

---

works of art. In order to clarify his point, Proclus once again refers to the discussion in Plato *R.* X.

<sup>40</sup> *In Crat.* XVII p. 8, 4–7: ἵ γάρ Ἐπίκουρος ἔλεγεν ὅτι οὐχὶ ἐπιστημόνως οὗτοι ἔθεντο τὰ ὀνόματα, ἀλλὰ φυσικῶς κινούμενοι ὥς οἱ βήσσοντες καὶ πταίροντες καὶ μυκώμενοι καὶ ὕλακτοῦντες καὶ στενάζοντες.

<sup>41</sup> *In Crat.* XVII p. 8, 1–4: ὁ δὲ Κρατύλος κατὰ τὸ τέταρτον διὸ καὶ ἰδίον φησιν ἑκάστου πράγματος εἶναι τὸ ὄνομα ὡς οἰκείως τεθὲν ὑπὸ τῶν πρώτως θεμένων ἐντέχνως καὶ ἐπιστημόνως.

<sup>42</sup> It is for this reason that I do not accept the emendation of this text proposed by Sheppard 1987: 148–149. According to the to the mss. Epicurus understands φύσει in the first sense, Cratylus in the second, and Socrates in the fourth. Something has evidently go wrong here for it is clear that Epicurus actually understand φύσει in the second sense. The editor of the text, G. Pasquali, adopted an emendation by H. Usener according to which Epicurus understands φύσει in the second sense, while Cratylus and Socrates understand it in the fourth. Sheppard has argued that we should assume that Epicurus understands φύσει in the second sense, Cratylus in the third, and Socrates in the fourth. She does so on the basis of the interpretation of Cratylus’ position by Proclus’ student Ammonius in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione*. However, this reading of the text sits ill with the fact that Proclus explicitly presents Cratylus as a scientific person who is, at least to some extent, right in claiming that there exists a natural correctness of names. Ammonius’ interpretation of the *Cratylus*, I shall argue, differs from that of Proclus, since Ammonius, contrary to Proclus, wishes to harmonize Aristotle’s semantic theory with that of Plato. On Ammonius and his interpretation of the *Cratylus*, see further pp. 201–205.

that names are natural as such, Socrates argues that they are only natural *qua* form, not *qua* matter, i.e. not *qua* sound.<sup>43</sup>

If Proclus dwells on this difference between Epicurus' theory of natural names and that of Cratylus and Socrates, it is because it is crucial to his overall interpretation of the *Cratylus*. As we have seen in our discussion of the σκοπός of the dialogue, Proclus believes that the aim of the dialogue is to promote self-knowledge. The fact that we are able to coin suitable, natural names of eternal, metaphysical entities shows that we are capable of knowledge of these entities and that we are in some way related to these (in keeping with the first principle of Platonic epistemology that like is known by like). Moreover, the fact that naming is a craft connects us to the divine Craftsman from the *Timaeus*. In sum, Proclus does not want his reader to confuse the Epicurean theory of the natural origin of names, which excludes any form of intelligent design, with the Platonic theory of the natural correctness of names according to which correct names are coined by a skillful person equipped with philosophical knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

## 7. Socrates' discussion with Hermogenes: the natural correctness of names

### 7.1 Hermogenes' position

After these prolegomena, Proclus turns to the interpretation of Hermogenes' discussion with Socrates. According to Hermogenes, we can give anything any name that we please. As he puts it at the beginning of the *Cratylus*:

---

<sup>43</sup> *In Crat.* XVI p. 8, 8–14. ὁ δὲ Σωκράτης κατὰ τὸ τέταρτον σημαίνονμενον λέγει φύσει εἶναι τὰ ὀνόματα, ὥς διανοίας μὲν ἐπιστήμονος ἔκγονα (cf. *In Crat.* I p. 3, 7–8 = **T. 4.1**: τῆς νοερᾶς ἐπιστήμης ἐστὶν ἔκγονα) καὶ οὐχὶ ὀρέξεως φυσικῆς, ἀλλὰ ψυχῆς φανταζομένης (cf. *In Crat.* II p. 19, 11: the soul makes names aided by its verbal φαντασία), οἰκείως δὲ τοῖς πράγμασι τεθέντα ἐξ ἀρχῆς κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν· καὶ κατὰ μὲν τὸ εἶδος τὰ αὐτὰ πάντα καὶ μίαν ἔχει δύναμιν καὶ φύσει ἐστίν, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ὕλην διαφέρει ἀλλήλων καὶ θέσει ἐστίν· κατὰ μὲν γὰρ τὸ εἶδος ἔοικε τοῖς πράγμασι, κατὰ δὲ τὴν ὕλην διαφέρει ἀλλήλων (cf. *In Crat.* X p. 4, 16–18 = **T. 4.2**).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* XX. p. 8, 24–25: someone who wants to imitate something needs a twofold knowledge (ἐπιστήμονα δυοῖν), knowledge of the archetype (ἀρχετύπου) and knowledge of the craft (τῆς δημιουργικῆς τέχνης).



**T. 4.7** I believe that any name you give a thing is its correct name. If you change its name (μεταθῆται) and give it another, the new one is as correct as the old, like when we change (μετατιθέμεθα) the names of our domestic slaves (*Crat.* 384 d 2–5; trans. Reeve adapted).

Proclus recognizes in Hermogenes' reason for assuming that names are correct by convention Democritus' argument from μετάθεσις (cf. § 5 above). He paraphrases Hermogenes' words as follows:

**T. 4.8** If there is μετάθεσις of names, names are by convention (θέσει) and symbols of the things.  
Now the first is the case,  
and hence the second follows (*In Crat.* XXX p. 10, 23–26).

Proclus responds by launching the standard counterargument: if names were just conventional, there would be no need for μετάθεσις. He takes this to imply that if there was no need for it, μετάθεσις would not occur at all. On this assumption he reduces Hermogenes' argument to an absurdity: if there is μετάθεσις, there is no μετάθεσις.<sup>45</sup> This *reductio ad absurdum* is, of course, incorrect. From the fact that there is no need for μετάθεσις, it does not follow that it does not occur. In fact, as we shall see shortly, Proclus assumes that μετάθεσις occurs frequently in the case of the names of individuals, precisely because these names are to a large extent conventional.

Be that as it may, Proclus now concludes that

**T. 4.9** Therefore, the followers of Hermogenes speak badly: for they only look at the particulars (καθ' ἑκάστα), but not at the eternal things (τὰ αἰδία) also. For even the names of the eternal things are divine and venerable, like statues of the gods, on which the powers and activities of the gods have been impressed. These are the names that Socrates in the *Philebus* (12c) reveres and holds in respect "beyond the greatest fear" (*In Crat.* XXX p. 11, 1–6).

This is an interesting passage. We have already seen that, according to Proclus, Hermogenes fails to take notice of the names of eternal beings. Since eternal beings, in contrast to individuals, can be known, it is possible to give them appropriate names. But why should we assume that these names are indeed correct by nature, especially if these eternal beings turn out to be gods? What difference is there between the name of Hermogenes and that of Hermes? If we can change the former as

<sup>45</sup> *In Crat.* XXX pp. 10, 29–11, 1.

we please, why couldn't we change the latter likewise? Proclus' point is that the names of the gods are unlike the names of mortal human beings. It is one thing for Hermogenes, Diodorus Cronus and others to rename their slaves as they please, no matter how ridiculous these names may be (cf. **T. 3.10**), it is quite another to rename the gods. The ancient Greeks would never think of changing these on a whim, even though Iamblichus had accused them of doing precisely that.<sup>46</sup> As in many other cultures, the Greeks had an immense respect for everything that belonged to the divine, including the names of the gods and their statues to which Proclus here compares the names of the gods.<sup>47</sup> In Greek religion, the statues of the gods were treated as if they were the gods themselves. One has only to think of the rituals of bathing, clothing and feeding statues, such as that of Athena Polias in Athens. This identification of the deity with its statue continued down to Proclus' own days, as is illustrated by the eagerness of the Christian authorities to remove the statue of Athena from the Parthenon and Proclus' countermeasure by turning his own home into a shrine and thus a home for the goddess. The reason for this identification is precisely that the statues resemble the gods: they show the powers and activities of the gods which have been impressed upon them (ἀποτυπούμενα), just as one makes an imprint with a seal in wax. Proclus' point, which he will make later on in the *Commentary* more fully, is that the names are like the statues of the gods in that they too resemble the gods. They are thus φύσει in the Platonic sense discussed above.<sup>48</sup>

The argument may carry little conviction for us moderns, but in a discussion with fellow Neoplatonists, who were all very religious people, it may have been effective enough against people like Porphyry who held that all names are a matter of convention. As we have seen, Porphyry, even though he subscribed to Aristotle's semantic theory, had written a work on the meaning of the statues of the gods in which he also analyzed their names.<sup>49</sup> He thus implicitly admitted that divine names at least are images of their objects and hence are φύσει in the sense of the

<sup>46</sup> See pp. 80–81.

<sup>47</sup> Damascius ascribes this argument to a certain Democritus (probably the Platonist, certainly not the Atomist), see p. 211 n. 34.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 125, 3–8 where Proclus quotes once again the passage from the *Philebus* and comments that Socrates' respect for divine names is justified because they are the ultimate echoes of the gods (τὰ ἔσχατα τῶν θεῶν ἀπηχήματα).

<sup>49</sup> On Porphyry, see pp. 74–75.

*Cratylus*. It has been noted that the explicit comparison of divine names to divine statues only appears in the works of Athenian Neoplatonists from Hierocles onwards, but not before.<sup>50</sup> This is, I assume, because they, in their defense of the Platonic semantic theory, picked up on an already existent tradition among Platonists of interpreting sacred divine names and statues and turned it into an argument for the Platonic position that names are natural and like images of their objects. Divine names belong to the category of names of eternal things, and what goes for divine names, goes, therefore, for names of eternal things in general.

## 7.2. Three arguments against Hermogenes (*In Crat.* XXXIII)

Having refuted Hermogenes' position himself, Proclus now turns to the actual refutation of Hermogenes by Socrates in the *Cratylus*. He assumes that Socrates refutes Hermogenes with three arguments of increasing importance: the first is a so-called ἐντροπεπτικόν argument, the second is called a compelling (βιαστικόν) argument, whereas the third is one that leads to complete persuasion (πειθοῦς τελεωτάτης αἴτιον).<sup>51</sup>

What are these for sort of arguments and where does Proclus locate them in the text? An ἐντροπεπτικόν argument is literally an argument that makes one feel ashamed, apparently of what one has said oneself. According to Hesychius, ἐντροπεπτικῶς means ἐλεγκτικῶς (cf. L.-S.-J.: “*refutative*, of indirect modes of proof such as the *reductio ad absurdum*”). This description fits the various occurrences of the word in the ancient commentators well. Philoponus *In Phys.* 96, 8–10, for instance, describes an ἐντροπεπτικὸν ἐπιχείρημα as an argument not based on the nature of the things under discussion, but as one directed against one's opponent. Proclus uses it in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, when young Socrates is forced to draw the absurd conclusion from what he has just said himself that a Form is divided.<sup>52</sup> Since this type of argument does not depend on the nature of things, but on the words of the opponents, it is often used as a first argument, intended to make the other think over his position again.<sup>53</sup> The other two arguments, on the other hand, argue not against Hermogenes' position but in favor of the opposite thesis, i.e. that names are by nature.

<sup>50</sup> Hirschle 1979: 39 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* XXXIII p. 11, 15–23.

<sup>52</sup> See Proclus *In Parm.* IV 866, 11, translated by Morrow & Dillon as ‘shocking’.

<sup>53</sup> Cf., apart from the passages mentioned above, also Olympiodorus *In Grg.* 9. 2 and 3; Jackson, Lycos & Tarrant 1998 aptly translate ‘embarrassing’.

The so-called ‘compelling’ argument the conclusion of which follows necessarily by logic.<sup>54</sup> From the fact that Proclus finds the ἐντρεπτικόν argument in *Crat.* 385a and the third, persuasive argument in *Crat.* 391c10ff., it can be deduced that Proclus locates this second, logically compelling, argument in between these two passages, where Socrates argues that names are instruments for dividing reality and instructing others. We shall find that Proclus indeed rewrites this section of the *Cratylus* into a series of logical arguments (see esp. *In Crat.* XLVI and XLVIII).

Comparison to Proclus’ *Commentary on Alcibiades I* suggests that Proclus interpreted the refutation of Hermogenes up to this point as some kind of purification. In his commentary on the former dialogue, Proclus explains that the first section of that dialogue aims at:

**T. 4.10** ...taking away the ignorance (ἄγνοια) from our intellect and the impediments to knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) that are in it because of generation, removing them by means of many syllogisms of every sort (πολλοῖς δὴ τισι καὶ παντοδαποῖς συλλογισμοῖς) (Proclus *In Alc.* 14, 10–13).

The many syllogisms that Proclus finds in the first part of the discussion with Hermogenes serve the same point: like Alcibiades, Hermogenes suffers from a double ignorance.<sup>55</sup> As Proclus pointed out in his discussion of the character of Hermogenes, he is led astray by the world of becoming, which he believes to be the only level of reality that there is. He does not know that he does not know about the real objects of knowledge, the Forms. At the end of the discussion with Hermogenes, Proclus refers to this double ignorance when he briefly lists the five epistemic conditions of the human soul: double ignorance (διπλὴ ἄγνοια), single ignorance (ἁπλὴ ἄγνοια), desire (ἐφεςις), investigation (ζήτησις), and discovery (εὔρεσις). At this stage Hermogenes has apparently been cured, for Socrates will now teach him the methods of investigation (αἱ μέθοδοι τῆς εὐρέσεως) that amounts to discovery, the highest form of human knowledge, i.e. investigation of intelligible reality through names.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See Arist. *Top.* 105a18: ὁ δὲ συλλογισμὸς βιαστικώτερον (i.e. a deduction is more compelling than an induction); cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias *In Top.* 87, 1–2: ὁ δὲ συλλογισμὸς ... τὸ ἀναγκαῖον καὶ τὸ βιαστικὸν ἔχει.

<sup>55</sup> For the double ignorance from which Alcibiades suffers, see Proclus *In Alc.* 293, 17ff.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* LXV for the five epistemic conditions; *In Crat.* LXVI for the fact that Socrates will now reveal to Hermogenes the methods of investigation.

The third argument, finally, surpasses logical proof. It leads to complete persuasion. Proclus distinguishes between two types of persuasion (πειθώ): one inferior to logical demonstration and one superior. In *Theol. Plat.* I 6, for instance, he opposes demonstrative logical argumentation, which is compelling, to persuasion based on divinely inspired myths as can be found in, for example, Homer. This sort of argument leads to persuasion of the superior type.<sup>57</sup> Proclus assumes that Plato introduces this sort of argument when he makes Hermogenes ask Socrates to try to really persuade (πειθέσθαι) him of the natural correctness of names by telling him in what precisely this natural correctness consists.<sup>58</sup> Socrates, in his characteristic manner, denies possessing any knowledge about the topic himself, but appeals to the authority of Homer. From Homer it appears that gods and men call the same things by different names. Given the superiority of the gods, we have to assume that the divine names are better.<sup>59</sup> Hence the divine Homer, too, teaches us that there exists a natural correctness of names.<sup>60</sup> We shall not deal with this passage in the present chapter, but postpone discussion of it until chapter six when we shall turn to Proclus' discussion of divine names.<sup>61</sup>

### 7.3 The ἐντρεπτικόν argument (*In Crat.* XXXIII)

In *Crat.* 385a Hermogenes agrees with Socrates that on his account one may personally use the name 'horse' for what is commonly referred to

<sup>57</sup> *Theol. Plat.* I 6 p. 29, 14–17: “This type of discourse (viz. myth) is not demonstrative (ἀποδεικτικόν) but inspired (ἐνθεαστικόν), constructed by the Ancients not in order to compel people but to persuade them (οὐδὲ ἀνάγκης ἀλλὰ πειθοῦς ἕνεκα τοῖς παλαιοῖς μεμηχανημένον), aiming not at mere instruction (μαθήσεως ψιλῆς) but at sympathy with divine reality (τῆς πρὸς τὰ πράγματα συμπαθείας στοχαζόμενον).”

<sup>58</sup> *Crat.* 390e6–391a3: (Hermogenes) Οὐκ ἔχω, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅπως χρή πρὸς ἃ λέγεις ἐναντιοῦσθαι. ἴσως μέντοι οὐ ῥάδιόν ἐστιν οὕτως ἐξαίφνης πεισθῆναι, ἀλλὰ δοκῶ μοι ὦδε ἂν μᾶλλον πιθέσθαι σοι, εἴ μοι δείξειας ἥντινα φῆς εἶναι τὴν φύσει ὀρθότητα ὀνόματος.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Crat.* 391c10–392b2.

<sup>60</sup> Proclus had already hinted at this argument in the prolegomena, see **T. 4.2** where he contrasts the divine name 'MURINE' to the human name 'Batieia'.

<sup>61</sup> Schofield 1972 and Ritoré Ponce 1992b offer different interpretations of the three arguments. According to Schofield *In Crat.* XXXVIII constitutes the second argument and *In Crat.* XLVI the third; Ritoré Ponce, in response to Schofield, identifies *In Crat.* XXXVI–XXXVII as the second argument and *In Crat.* XXXVIII as the third. However, neither *In Crat.* XLVI nor *In Crat.* XXXVIII are what Proclus would consider to be persuasive arguments.

as ‘man’ and vice versa. Proclus assumes that it contains an ἐντρεπτικόν argument, which he describes thus:

**T. 4.11** And the first argument is as follows:

if names are by imposition, individual and city alike will have the authority to name things, and the things will be called by ever different names, and names will be exchanged in many different ways,<sup>62</sup> because of the fact that the particulars are undefined and the product of change and the fact that these names are chosen without knowledge and because they are a matter of opinion.

But the consequence is not the case;

hence neither is the antecedent (*In Crat.* XXXIII p. 11, 18–23).

In this lapidary form, Proclus’ argument may be difficult to understand, but it helps to bear in mind that as we have seen (**T. 3.10**), Proclus assumes that if we leave naming to the *hoi polloi*, they will primarily name the perceptible particulars because these are in front of everybody’s eyes. Since these are in a permanent state of change, we would expect things to change names all the time. Such, however, is not the case: our language appears to be quite stable. This is due to the real subject matter of (most) names, the stable, eternal Forms, as well as to the fact that those who name the things have knowledge of these. From the obvious stability of language, it thus follows that Hermogenes cannot be right.

In his *Commentary on the Alcibiades* Proclus explicitly makes the point that the degree of stability of names depends on the degree of stability of the objects named:

**T. 4.12...** [I]n the *Cratylus* Socrates says that the names of the eternal things rather touch on the nature of these things, whereas the names of the things that become and perish change in many ways and are to a high degree the product of convention because of the unstable movement of the objects to which they refer (*In Alc.* 22, 13–18).

In the same paragraph Proclus observes furthermore that in the *Timaeus* Plato makes the same point. It is worth taking a closer look at the

<sup>62</sup> Reading πολυσχεδῶς with the MSS. (Pasquali: πολυσχιδῶς). Both words are attested in Proclus, see, e.g., *In Parm.* V 1009, 12 and V 1032, 6 for πολυσχεδής (multifarious), and *In Crat.* CLXXIV p. 99, 9 for πολυσχιδής. The latter means ‘split into many parts’ (from σχίζω) and is the opposite of unity. Here the point is not so much that names are split into many parts, but that on Hermogenes’ account the names of things will constantly be changed in every new ways.

relevant passage from the *Timaeus* and Proclus' commentary on it, since he assumes that in the *Timaeus* Plato formulates some kind of axiom that is also at work in the *Cratylus*. The relevant passage is Timaeus' explanation of why he can only offer a 'likely myth' (*Ti.* 29d2: εἰκὼς μῦθος) about the material cosmos:

**T. 4.13** A *logos* is akin to (συγγενεῖς) the things which it interprets—a *logos* of that which is abiding and stable (μονίμου καὶ βεβαίου) and discoverable by the aid of intellect will itself be abiding and unchangeable (μονίμους καὶ ἀμεταπτότους)... while an account of what is made in the image of that other, but is only a likeness, will itself be but likely, standing to the former kind in a proportion: as reality is to becoming, so is truth to belief (πίστις) (Plato *Ti.* 29b4–c3; trans. after Cornford).

Here we have the same sets of oppositions as in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*: 'abiding and unchangeable' objects (cf. 'the eternal things') are the objects of intellectual study and are expressed in true λόγοι, whereas in the case of this material cosmos (cf. **T. 4.2** 'the perishable things') we only have λόγοι that express belief. From belief to opinion (δόξα), with which Proclus associates Hermogenes, it is only a small step.<sup>63</sup> The idea that λόγοι should be akin to their objects was clearly an important one to Proclus, for in his commentary on this passage, he calls it an ἀξίωμα (*In Tim.* I 340, 21) and he stresses that these *logoi* derive their quality of stability from the fact that they represent stable objects.<sup>64</sup>

A clear indication that Proclus based his discussion of the two types of names on this 'axiom' from the *Timaeus* is the following description of this relation of a *logos* about the intelligible to its objects which strongly recalls what Proclus had said in *In Crat.* I (see **T. 4.1**):

**T. 4.14**... ὅδε ὁ λόγος ὁ τῶν πραγμάτων συγγενής ἐστι τοῖς πράγμασι (cf. *In Crat.* I p. 1, 8–9: τῆς πρὸς τὰ πράγματα συγγενείας) καὶ οἶον ἔγγονος (cf. *In Crat.* I p. 1, 8: ἔκγονα) αὐτῶν· ἀποτελεῖται γὰρ ἐκ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν γνώσεων (cf. *In Crat.* I p. 1, 7–8: τῆς νοερᾶς ἐπιστήμης) τῶν συστοίχων τοῖς πράγμασι (*In Tim.* I 341, 18–21).

The *logos* of things is akin to these things and as it were an offspring of these. For they are the result of knowledge in us which corresponds to the things.

<sup>63</sup> Alcinoüs *Didasc.* IV 3, e.g., indeed does so in his paraphrase of this passage from the *Timaeus*.

<sup>64</sup> On Proclus' commentary on this passage, see further Gersh 2003: 150f.; for the fact that stable objects of discourse produce stable discourse, see *In Tim.* I 342, 11–25 where Proclus comments in detail on *Ti.* 29b.

Proclus' interpretation of this aspect of the *Cratylus* merits closer inspection, for he seems to have hit on something. In *Crat.* 408b–d, which discusses the name of the god Pan, we find the same distinction between two types of language, one about the divine world and the other about the world of becoming. The appearance of the god Pan, the son of Hermes and the inventor of speech, displays the ambiguous nature of language. The upper part of Pan's body is human and represents truthful language. It is “smooth and divine (θεῖον), dwelling above with the gods (ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς)”.—One passage it seems, which inspired Proclus to call the names of eternal beings divine names.—The lower part, on the other hand, is that of a goat. It represents falsehood and μῦθοι and is to be found “below among the mass of men.”<sup>65</sup> Various other passages too suggest that this opposition between truth and falsehood has to do with the nature of the object that is named. As we have already seen above, according to *Crat.* 397b the names of the eternal beings are far more likely to be examples of correctly established names than names of perishable entities like those of human beings and heroes. One page earlier (*Crat.* 396b–c), Socrates had already observed that the study of the (eternal) οὐρανόα, the heavenly phenomena, produced a pure intellect, whereas later on (*Crat.* 411b) we are told that the name-givers of old got dizzy when they tried to name (apparently) other things and were thus led to the belief (δόξα) that there is nothing μόνιμον and βέβαιον about the world. In this respect D. Sedley has called attention to the fact that Plato appears to accept the names that deal with the gods and the eternal heavenly bodies as having been correctly established, i.e. to be philosophically sound, whereas he rejects those that bear on other topics as erroneous.<sup>66</sup> Finally, at the very end of the *Cratylus* (437a), Socrates observes that knowledge, ἐπιστήμη, is not about chasing after continuously changing objects, as they had previously assumed (*Crat.* 412a), but about making the soul stand still at the things, thus implying that these are not constantly moving, but that they are stable. These observations prepare the way for the final conclusion of the *Cratylus*, i.e. that γνῶσις is itself something unchanging and of unchanging objects like beauty itself (*Crat.* 440b4–6: εἰ δὲ ἔστι μὲν αἰὲν τὸ γιγνώσκον, ἔστι δὲ τὸ γιγνώσκόμενον, ἔστι δὲ τὸ καλόν; cf. *Crat.* 439d5–6: τὸ

<sup>65</sup> Cf. the likely myth of the *Timaeus* (see the discussion of **T. 4.13** above). The passage from the *Cratylus* is well discussed by Brisson 1994a: 133–135.

<sup>66</sup> See Sedley 2003: 97–98 and 108–109.



καλὸν οὐ τοιοῦτον ἄεί ἐστιν οἶόν ἐστιν). In short, the *Cratylus* and the *Timaeus* hold comparable theories about the two types of speech, which correspond to two types of objects and two types of knowledge. From this correspondence Proclus concludes that the stability that the *Timaeus* ascribes to scientific *logoi* is also a quality of a constitutive part of these *logoi*, the *onomata* and that hence the names of eternal things are reliable sources of information about these them.

#### 7.4 The βιαστικόν argument from action (*In Crat.* XLVI)

Proclus discovers a double βιαστικόν argument in *Crat.* 387a–388b. One argument considers naming as an act (πρᾶξις), a second one is based on the identification of names with instruments (ὄργανον). When Proclus in *In Crat.* XXXIII refers to it as one argument, he probably does so because in the end they come down to the same thing: the nature of the thing on which is acted or on which the instrument is used determines the way in which an act is to be undertaken or how an instrument is to be shaped if the action is to be a success. The actual text of the *Cratylus* invites this division, even though this is commonly ignored by modern scholars: in the introduction to his argument in favor of a natural correctness of names (*Crat.* 387a), Socrates claims that if we want to cut something successfully, we have to cut it in accordance with the nature of the cutting of that particular thing (which in turn depends on the nature of that thing) and with the thing naturally suited to the task (κατὰ τὴν φύσιν βουλευθῶμεν ἕκαστον τέμνειν τοῦ τέμνειν τε καὶ τέμνεσθαι καὶ ᾧ πέφυκε). Moreover, the transition from one part of the argument concerning the nature of action of cutting to the other one concerning the suitable instrument is clearly marked (387d10: φέρε δῆ).

In keeping with the logical nature of a βιαστικόν argument, both arguments are presented in a strictly logical format. In addition to these arguments Proclus derives from each one an argument against Aristotle's claim in *De Interpretatione* that names are not natural but conventional.

According to Plato *Crat.* 386e4–387d, for actions to be correct, they have to be undertaken in accordance with the objects of these actions, the πράγματα. Speaking is a form of action, and therefore naming, being a part of speaking, should also be performed in keeping with its objects.

Proclus *In Crat.* XLVI offers his readers a strictly analytical presentation of Plato's text by rewriting Plato's text into a series of syllogistic

arguments that trace back the Platonic text in reversed order. Starting from the syllogism that is intended to prove that names have a natural correctness, he subsequently analyzes the supplementary premise or additional assumption (πρόσληψις) into a new syllogism, the supplementary premise of which is once again analyzed and so forth.<sup>67</sup> This procedure of clarifying a text by reworking it into a series of syllogisms is common in the ancient commentators on Aristotle, who himself had already recommended it as an exercise (γυμνασία, see Aristotle *Top.* 164a12–b7). It is, for instance, very common in Alexander's commentaries,<sup>68</sup> who observes that the order of these formulations is the inverse of that of natural language, as is the case here in the commentary on the *Cratylus*. The main function of this exercise was to test the original argument.<sup>69</sup> The Athenian Neoplatonists started to apply this procedure to Plato's texts. It is indicative of a trend, first pointed out by L. G. Westerink, to pay close attention to the argumentative structure of Plato's dialogues. It had apparently been initiated by Proclus' teacher Syrianus in reaction to Iamblichus' intuitive approach. Following Plotinus, Iamblichus rated intuitive understanding over discursive thought and hence appears to have had little interest in a discursive, step by step analysis of Platonic texts. Of course neither Syrianus nor Proclus did object to Iamblichus' preference of intuitive understanding over discursive thought, nor did they completely discard the resulting approach to Plato's texts, yet they also made the point of scrutinizing the actual text itself. As a result, the interpretation of Plato's reasoning became increasingly careful.<sup>70</sup>

Each syllogism corresponds to a section from the *Cratylus*. The central role of the τὰ πράγματα as the determining factor of an action

<sup>67</sup> For the meaning of the term πρόσληψις, see Barnes 2003: 8–9. He explains it thus: “[πρόσληψις] means ‘additional assumption’, or ‘supplementary premiss’. You are trying to construct an argument for a given thesis. You take or are offered one pertinent proposition which may serve as an assumption or premiss; and then you hunt about for another—which will therefore be a further assumption or πρόσληψις.”

<sup>68</sup> See, e.g., Alexander of Aphrodisias *In Meta.* 322, 30 ff.; 443, 12 ff.; 590, 7 ff.

<sup>69</sup> On the use of syllogistic reformulations in the commentators on Aristotle, see Dalimier 2000.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Westerink 1976: 14–18. As an example of this new approach he refers to the analysis of the argument from harmony by Proclus and Damascius in Damascius' commentary on the *Phaedo* (*In Phd.* I §§ 361–370; §§ 405–406; II 45–53); for the particular form of logical analyses which we have here in our commentary, see, e.g., Damascius esp. *In Phd.* I 264–265 and cf. further *In Phd.* I §§ 49, 5; 57; 184; 262, 10; 474; cf. Olympiodorus *In Gorg.* 45, 2 who explains why Plato in the passage under discussion has left out the πρόσληψις and then supplements it.

becomes sufficiently clear. When one reads through the argument it appears that the previous sections of the commentary from *In Crat.* XXXVIII onwards prepare the way for the construction of the argument. References to these, as well as to Plato's text, have been added in small print.

**T. 4.15** Now a demonstration that shows that the correct name has received its correctness by nature and not by imposition is called for.

And first one has to speak thus: if the naming that happens in the natural way to name things is correct, the name has its correctness by nature. But the first, and therefore the second.

The second argument analyses the supplementary premise: if speaking has its correctness through the things, naming too is correct insofar as it has occurred in the natural way to name things. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 387c6–10: if the action of correct speaking depends on the things, so does naming since it is a part of speaking and therefore it is also an action. Proclus *In Crat.* XLV p. 14, 10–30 argues for the correctness of this argument, which at first may seem problematic (ἄπορον).

The third argument analyses the supplementary premise of the second argument: if every action done in conformity to the nature of things is well executed, speaking too has its correctness through the things. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 387b8–c3: speaking is an action, and therefore speaking well means speaking in accordance with the objects of speech. Proclus *In Crat.* XLIV p. 14, 3–9 shows by means of dihaeresis that speaking is an action. For an action is performed on the basis of rational choice (προαίρεσις), as is the case for speaking.

The fourth argument analyses the supplementary premise of the third argument: if all things have some sort of proper nature and if actions are not by convention, actions are well executed when done in conformity with the nature of things. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 386e6–387b7: actions, e.g. burning and cutting, have to be undertaken in keeping with their objects if they are to be successful. Proclus *In Crat.* XLIII pp. 13, 28 ff. comments on the difference between acting (πραττεῖν) and doing (ποιεῖν), while insisting that in both cases things do not happen by chance.

The fifth argument analyses the supplementary premise of the fourth argument: if it is not the case that all things have all attributes simultaneously forever, or that each thing is privately for each person, things have some sort of nature proper to each of them. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 386d8–e5: the rejection of Euthydemus' view as well as that of Protagoras. Proclus *In Crat.* XLII p. 13, 19–27 points to the first Limit (τὸ πῆρας) as the metaphysical principle of each thing having a proper nature of its own.

The sixth argument analyses the supplementary premise of the fifth argument: if some men are very intelligent and others are the opposite, it is not the case that all things have all attributes simultaneously forever, or that each thing is privately for each person. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 386b9–386d7: if either Euthydemus is right that all things have all attributes simultaneously forever or if Protagoras is right that each thing is in a unique way to each person, everybody would be equally intelligent. Proclus *In Crat.* XLI p. 13, 10–18 discusses the difference between the position of Protagoras and that of Euthydemus; *In Crat.* XXXVIII p. 12, 24–27 explains how Socrates' argument against Protagoras works.

The seventh argument analyses the supplementary premise of the sixth argument. If some people are very good, and other people are very bad, some are very intelligent, and others quite the opposite. But the first, and therefore the second.

Cf. *Crat.* 386a8–b8. Proclus *In Crat.* XXXIX p. 12, 28–30 explains the relation between goodness and intelligence along the lines of Socratic intellectualism (no one does wrong willingly). *In Crat.* XL adds some afterthoughts about the relation between good and bad men.

Proclus *In Crat.* XLVI p. 15, 1–26

### 7.5 Corollary: an argument against Aristotle (*In Crat.* XLVII)

As we have seen, Proclus, like Plotinus before him, is critically disposed towards Aristotle. Proclus here uses Plato's argument in favor of the natural correctness of names to demonstrate that Aristotle's semantic theory is inconsistent. In a text discussed in chapter one (**T. 1.13**), Aristotle claims that every sentence (λόγος) is significant "not as a tool but, as we said, by convention". As we have noted, "as we said" probably refers to Aristotle's discussion of why names are conventional symbols. He then continues by saying that not every sentence is a statement-making sentence (λόγος ἀποφαντικός), but only those in which there is truth or falsity. From this, Proclus infers that for Aristotle to be true or false is an essential characteristic of statement-making sentences. They do not possess this characteristic by convention, "therefore names are not by convention".

In its present condensed form, the argument as such is not very clear, but the preceding analysis of the *Cratylus* throws some helpful light on it. Statement-making sentences are either true (correct) or false. As Proclus' third argument shows, speaking has its correctness through the things. From it follows the second argument ("if speaking has its correctness through the things, naming too is correct insofar as it has

occurred in the natural way to name things”), and next the first (“if the naming that happens in the natural way to name things is correct, the name has its correctness by nature”). It is almost needless to say that what holds true for a whole does not necessarily hold true for its parts, and that from the fact that there are correct and incorrect statements, it does not necessarily follow that there are correct and incorrect names.

### 7.6 The βιαστικόν argument from names as ὄργανα (*In Crat.* XLVIII)

*Crat.* 387d–388b focuses on names as instruments: if one is to do a job successfully, it has to be done with the right, i.e. naturally suited, tool for the job. Hence names being tools, there exists a natural correctness of names.

Proclus *In Crat.* XLVIII presents the text in a strictly logical manner, be it that this time it does not take the form of Aristotelian syllogisms, but that of a Platonic dihaeresis. Starting from the fact that every name-giver does something and does so by means of an instrument, Proclus now establishes what kind of instrument a name is. There are natural (φύσει) instruments like a hand and a foot, and those that are θέσει, such as the bridle and the name. ‘Natural’ is used here in the Aristotelian sense discussed above.<sup>71</sup> Of the latter, some instruments are intended to make something with, such as the adze,<sup>72</sup> others to teach and express the essence of things. Proclus next recalls Plato’s definition of a name in a somewhat adapted form as an instrument that instructs (διδασκαλικόν) and reveals (ἐκφαντορικόν).<sup>73</sup> Proclus explains that the former element of the definition refers to the user of the instrument, the teacher (cf. *Crat.* 388b), whereas the latter element refers to the task of a name, i.e. revealing the thing to which it refers. Given that each instrument has a proper job (τὸ οἰκείον ἔργον) it follows that each instrument has a natural power (συμφυᾶ δύναμιν). Since in the case

<sup>71</sup> See § 6 above.

<sup>72</sup> The adze (σέπαρνον) is a stock example in ancient commentators on Plato and Aristotle, see, e.g., Olympiodorus *In Grg.* 5, 19.

<sup>73</sup> Note that Plato nowhere says that a name reveals the nature of its object, as observes Sheppard 1987: 146. She assumes that Proclus introduces the term ἐκφαντορικός under the influence of Aristotle’s use of σημαντικός at *De Int.* 17a1–2, the passage discussed in *In Crat.* XLIX. To my mind, it rather points to Proclus’ concept names as instruments that reveal the essences of the gods, just as theurgical statues do, see § 7.1 and chapter six § 5.1.

of a name this has to do with revealing the things they signify, names have to be akin to their objects (συγγενές τοῖς πράγμασι).

### 7.7 Corollary: an argument against Aristotle (*In Crat.* XLIX)

As he did with the previous argument, Proclus uses this Platonic passage to expose an inconsistency in Aristotle's semantic theory. It concerns once again the latter's claim that a sentence is meaningful by convention (θέσει), not as an ὄργανον, instrument (*Int.* 17a1–2). Proclus supplies an argument for this thesis that is frequently cited in the ancient commentators on Aristotle and probably goes back on Alexander.<sup>74</sup> Whereas movement itself is natural, the way in which one moves need not be: dancing, for instance, a certain type of movement, is clearly θέσει. In the same way emitting sound is natural, but speaking a name, a meaningful sound is a matter of convention.

Proclus spots an inconsistency in the fact that Aristotle is willing to consider a sentence as an instrument, but then claims that it is meaningful by convention. Admittedly a name is not natural in the sense that it is has been spontaneously produced (cf. § 5). It is indeed an instrument designed by a craftsman. Yet it has been designed for a certain purpose: to reveal its object (p. 17, 26: τέλος γὰρ καὶ ἀγαθὸν τὸ ἐκφαίνειν τὰ πράγματα). Hence it needs to be an image of its object, and in that sense it is natural. Hence the fact that a name is an instrument implies that it cannot be by convention, as Aristotle has it. However, this all depends on the assumption that names should reveal the nature of the thing that they signify, an assumption to which Aristotle does not subscribe.

## 8 *Names of mortal individuals* (*In Crat.* LXXX–XCV)

### 8.1 The εἶδος of a personal name (*In Crat.* LXXXI)

As we have seen, Proclus attaches much weight to Plato's distinction between the names of eternal and mortal beings. In this section, we shall take a closer look at Proclus' theory concerning these names by studying his comments on *Crat.* 392b–395e. In this passage, Socrates studies the correctness of human names. After analyzing the names of

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Ammonius *In Int.* 63, 7–18. For a discussion of this passage see, e.g., Sheppard 1987: 144–145; Blank 1996: 154 n. 232.

Hector's son in the *Iliad*, he moves on to investigate the aptness of the names of the family of Tantalus. His final conclusion is, as we have seen, that these personal names are not very likely to be correct. Socrates' discussion about personal names is a bit disappointing, especially when one compares it to the lively debate on personal names in contemporary philosophy. It is, in the words of D. Sedley, "an untidy corner of the theory, awaiting more work."<sup>75</sup> Tidying up this corner of the *Cratylus* is precisely what Proclus does in his commentary.

About this category of names Proclus had said in his description of the σκοπός of the dialogue that they are 'by chance'. When giving those names we often go wrong both because "the divisible activity of our souls" and "particular nature" may fail its proper ends. The first thing to note about these names is that Proclus apparently assumes that there exists, at least potentially, a natural correctness of these names too, i.e. personal names may offer an adequate description of an individual. But what counts as an adequate description of an individual? In late Antiquity, there existed something like John Searle's cluster theory of personal names. Porphyry, probably taking his lead from Plato *Tht.* 209c, had argued that an individual is an individual because he consists of a conglomeration of individuating qualities. In line with this, the Christian author Basil of Caesarea assumed that when we hear a person's name we think of a conglomeration of individuating properties.<sup>76</sup> This is, however, not what Proclus has in mind. He assumes that the case of the names of individuals is analogous to that of other things. In keeping with Socrates' remark that in the case of person names too names are correct if "the being or essence (οὐσία) of the thing is in control and is expressed in the name"<sup>77</sup>, Proclus assumes that individuals too have a form, and that it is this form that a name, if it is to be correct, should express: "that the name-giver needs to look at the forms (τὰ εἶδη τῶν ὀνομαζομένων) of those to be named when he makes a name."<sup>78</sup>

It may come as a bit of a surprise to be told that in giving and explaining names of individual beings we have to look at the εἶδος of that person. For, as we shall see,<sup>79</sup> Proclus denies the existence of Forms

<sup>75</sup> Sedley 2003: 155.

<sup>76</sup> On this issue, see further Sorabji 2004 (vol. 3) pp. 226–228 ("Names as descriptions"), and Sorabji forthcoming.

<sup>77</sup> Plato *Crat.* 397d4–5.

<sup>78</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXI p. 37, 26–28.

<sup>79</sup> See pp. 153–154.

of individuals properly speaking. The so-called young gods, servants to the Demiurge, create the individuals after the universal Form Man. They are thus the causes of the individuals. They are not, however, Forms in the Platonic sense of the word. Yet, in another sense, they are the forms of the individuals for they represent various types of life (εἶδος ζωῆς), e.g., a royal way of life or a philosophical one. Since they create the individual souls in their own image, their types of life are also those of the souls that they produce. Souls are free to live in accordance with this form of life or to go against their own nature. Those souls that choose to live in accordance with their own form of life will also call themselves with a name that brings out their close association with their guardian gods, whereas those that choose to live a life contrary to their nature will also use names that “actually belong to others and are theirs by chance” (ὀνόμασιν ἀλλοτρίοις χρῶνται καὶ τοῖς τυχοῦσιν, p. 38, 10–11). Proclus illustrates this by means of an example from Greek mythology. Heracles was called Alceides “after his mortal (fore)fathers”, an example of an inappropriate name given in memory of them.<sup>80</sup> The Pythia, however, ordered that he had to be called Heracles, because of the fact that he belonged to the ‘series’ of the deity Heracles (i.e. Proclus assumes that the *heros* Heracles is a lower manifestation of the god Heracles).

## 8.2 When nature fails: naming monsters (*In Crat.* LXXXII–LXXXIII)

We may often fail to name our children correctly, yet we are not the only ones to blame. Nature too, thus Proclus, often goes wrong as the case of monsters illustrates. Socrates had posited that, since it is natural that like begets like, children should be called after parents, unless the child turns out to be a monster. Monsters (τέρατα) are those who are born contrary to nature (παρὰ φύσιν). Examples of such monsters are a calf born from a horse, or an impious son born from a good man. Socrates concludes that in those cases we should give the offspring the name of the kind to which it belongs, not that of its parent (*Crat.* 393b–c).

<sup>80</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXI p. 38, 16: ἀπὸ τῶν θνητῶν τῶν πατέρων; ‘Alceides’ was the name of Heracles’ mortal grandfather, and the nickname of his father Ampythion. Proclus calls these ‘mortal’ forefathers, since Heracles’ true father is, of course, the immortal Zeus.



To the modern reader of the *Cratylus*, there may seem to be little about this passage that requires discussion. Yet, to Proclus the existence of monsters was something of a philosophical puzzle, related to the issue of the existence of evil, a topic to which he had dedicated a monograph. In that treatise, he argues that there exist two types of bodily evil: foulness and disease.<sup>81</sup> Foulness consists in “all things contrary to nature that are not diseases, for monsters too, are foulnesses of nature” (τὰ τέρατα φύσεως ἐστὶν αἴσχη). Proclus, who is at pains to show that evil is primarily to be located in the human soul and thus wants to reason away other forms of evil, explains that even monsters are, in a sense, according to nature. He does so by drawing a distinction between particular and universal nature. If a calf is born from a horse, the horse has clearly failed to pass its particular nature on to its offspring. However, a calf as such is not contrary to universal nature. There is after all nothing unnatural about a calf *per se*. Hence, even if the calf is a monster in respect of the particular nature of its parent, it is not a monster in respect of universal nature. Therefore such a creature is not really an evil.<sup>82</sup>

When dealing with monsters in the context of his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus appeals to the same distinction between particular and universal nature. He explains that we should distinguish between the universal causes (Forms) and the proximate, mortal ones (the parents). A horse may fail to produce offspring resembling itself, yet the offspring resembles something (a calf), since a superior, more perfect cause has

---

<sup>81</sup> Proclus *Mal. Subsist.* 60, 6–21, see Opsomer-Steel 2003: 102 f. for an English translation and notes. Proclus’ discussion of monsters recalls Aristotle *GA* 769b10 ff. where Aristotle explains the occurrence of monsters, i.e. the case in which the offspring of, e.g., two human beings does not just not resemble its father or mother, but does not even resemble a human being at all, but merely a living being. According to Aristotle, in those cases most of the ‘movements’ that govern procreation fail and the matter is uncontrolled, but in the end the most universal (μένει τὸ καθόλου μάλιστα—τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶ τὸ ζῶον) movement, that of living being remains. Note, though, that, contrary to Plato and Proclus, Aristotle denies that a horse will ever produce a cow. Rather, its cow-like offspring is a horse deformed in such a way that it resembles a cow. For, Aristotle argues, that it is impossible that a horse produces a cow is shown by the great difference in the period of gestation.

<sup>82</sup> It is interesting to note that Proclus’ own theories about monsters lead him to manipulate Plato’s text. According to Proclus (p. 39, 1–3), since monsters do not really exist, Plato says that such creatures are “like monsters” (οἷον τέρατα) instead of monsters, because they are not completely contrary to nature. Yet in fact Plato does not say that they are like monsters but that they *are* monsters (cf. *Crat.* 394d).

intervened and made it be something if not a horse. So even if the proximate cause it not always in control of matter, the universal cause is.<sup>83</sup> An illustration in point is the case of plants. Since their proximate cause is rather weak, it is easy to change one sort into another by means of grafting.<sup>84</sup> Yet, in this case too, the product is in accordance with universal nature and the offspring should be named in accordance with it.

### 8.3 An aporia: how to explain correct personal names? (*In Crat.* LXXXVIII)

If nature cannot be trusted to produce children that are like their parents and if we cannot possibly know the future lives of our children, how may we explain the fact that quite often we find that the names of children turn out to be appropriate after all? Proclus ascribes this to chance (τύχη). Above we have seen that the individual names are the product of chance. Proclus derives this notion of chance from Plato's remarks about the name of Orestes. Socrates believes that this name befits a man who will in due course kill his father. He remarks:

**T. 4.16** Thus the name ‘Ὀρέστης’ (‘Mountain-man’) is surely correct, Hermogenes, whether it was given to him by *chance* (τις τύχη) or by some poet, who displayed in his name the brutality, savagery, and ruggedness (τὸ ὀρεινὸν) of his nature (*Plato Crat.* 394e8–11).

No doubt Agamemnon did not have Orestes' savagery in mind when he named his son thus. Proclus speculates that he gave him this name because he hoped that his son might turn out to be someone noted for his vigor, ἰρμή, and quickness, his rushing forward (τὸ ὀρούρειν).<sup>85</sup> This passage may be read as an indication that for Plato chance was not necessarily some blind, irrational force.<sup>86</sup> This is precisely the line that Proclus takes. Chance, he says, should not be thought of as some irrational and undefined cause (τύχην ταύτην ἀλόγιστον αἰτίαν ἡγεῖσθω καὶ ἀόριστον). Instead, it should be considered as ‘a divine or daemonic’ power that does not leave anything without its proper care, but brings

<sup>83</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXII pp. 38, 22–39, 3.

<sup>84</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXIII p. 39, 4–8.

<sup>85</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 43, 22–26.

<sup>86</sup> Baxter 1992: 45: “τύχη is not necessarily incompatible with that rational ideal—it might be the expression of a providential world order”.

everything into line with the good and the order of the universe.<sup>87</sup> When the proximate cause of naming, e.g. Agamemnon in the case of Orestes, initially gets things wrong, chance, being the more universal cause, sees to it that in the end, in some unexpected way, the name turns out to be appropriate after all, “just as happens in nature”, i.e. just as the universal cause corrects the failure of the proximate cause in the case of monsters.<sup>88</sup>

#### 8.4 The names of the members of the house of Tantalus (*In Crat.* LXXXIX–XCV)

In *Crat.* 394e–395d Socrates discusses the meaning of the names of the members of the house of Atreus, working his way backwards from Orestes to Tantalus and his divine father, Zeus. His etymologies aim at showing the appropriateness of these names. This passage prompts Proclus to reflect on etymology from a Platonic perspective. In his book on the *Cratylus*, D. Sedley raises the question whether in the *Cratylus* etymology is supposed to be a τέχνη or not.<sup>89</sup> It is often supposed that it is not. Whereas a τέχνη presupposes rules, it seems that in the case of etymology everything goes. Sedley points to *Crat.* 393c–394b where Socrates dwells on the fact that even though names may seem different to the uninitiated because of the variation in their syllables, they may well be one and the same name since they mean the same thing. Socrates compares this to the doctor’s medicines. Samples of medicines may appear different to us, because they differ in color and smell, yet the doctor, who looks only at their powers to cure, may well conclude that they are one and the same. Likewise, “one who knows about names looks to their force or power and is not disconcerted if a letter is added, transposed, or subtracted, or even if the force a name possesses is embodied in different letters altogether”. From this comparison Sedley concludes that Plato indeed considers etymology to be a τέχνη. There can be little doubt that Proclus himself considers etymology to be a real craft. In his commentary on the Platonic passage just mentioned, he formulates an extensive list of things that an aspiring etymologist should know, such as knowledge of the dialects, of poetical

<sup>87</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 44, 8–10. This discussion of chance as a beneficent divine power in this world bears strong parallels to Proclus’ discussion of Plato *R.* 619c6 in *In RP.* II 298, 9–299, 28.

<sup>88</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 43, 26–44, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Sedley 2003: 41–50 (“Etymology as expertise”).

language, the ability to recognize simple and compound names, and so forth.<sup>90</sup> As the learnt *apparatus* in Pasquali's edition brings out, many of the items listed are derived from the ancient grammarians, be it that they discuss these issues in contexts other than that of etymology.<sup>91</sup> As such this passage is unique.

However necessary knowledge of such linguistic matters may be for an etymologist, Proclus stresses that it is not sufficient. He reproaches the grammarians that all they are interested in is the matter of name, i.e. the syllables that make up a name.<sup>92</sup> Proclus stresses that Plato's explanations of names—to which he sometimes refers as *ἐτυμγορία*, an otherwise unattested word<sup>93</sup>—starts from the thing that is shown by the name (τὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ δηλούμενον),<sup>94</sup> i.e. from the form of someone's life<sup>95</sup> and then goes on to examine how this is expressed by the syllables of the word, i.e. the matter of the word, instead of starting from the latter, as the grammarians do. Plato instead “despises the matter” (τῆς μὲν ὕλης καταφρονῶν).<sup>96</sup> In the case of the name ‘Orestes’, for example, “the thing revealed” about Ὀρέστης is his beastly nature (τὸ θηριώδης τῆς φύσεως). The words ἄγριον and ὀρεινόν are what is ‘like it’, i.e. they are more or less synonymous to τὸ θηριώδης τῆς φύσεως. Of the latter synonym we find traces in the syllables that have been used to express the name Ὀρέστης with. Contrary to what Proclus here suggests, this method of etymologizing through synonymy was very common in Antiquity, especially among grammarians.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>90</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXV.

<sup>91</sup> Proclus, no doubt, knew these things from his days as a pupil of a grammarian in Lycia (cf. Marinus *Proclus* § 8, 1–2).

<sup>92</sup> Indeed, the grammarian is not interested in etymology as a hermeneutic tool. He uses it in order to clarify the sense of a word or to distinguish between ‘barbarous’ and correct forms or words, as part of ἐλληνίζειν, i.e. using the Greek language correctly. See, e.g., the discussion of etymology as a means to establish what is correct Greek by Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians* (*Adversus Mathematicos* I), 241–247 with the informative commentary by Blank 1998: 255–257. Cf. also the second of the three senses of ἐλληνίζειν that Proclus distinguishes (pp. 89–91).

<sup>93</sup> The word is only known from Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, see *In Crat.* LXXXVIII p. 43, 29 (ἐτυμγορεῖν); *In Crat.* LXXXIX p. 45, 14; *In Crat.* XC p. 45, 23; *In Crat.* CIII p. 53, 7 and *In Crat.* CXXVIII p. 76, 17. Proclus seems to use it as a synonym of ἐτυμολογία.

<sup>94</sup> *In Crat.* LXXXIX p. 45, 15.

<sup>95</sup> *In Crat.* XC p. 45, 27.

<sup>96</sup> *In Crat.* XC p. 45, 23f.

<sup>97</sup> On this manner of etymologizing through synonyms, see Peraki-Kyriakidou 2002: 482–489; for Plato's *Cratylus*, see especially pp. 486–7.

The remark that Socrates “despises the matter” of names hints at the ethical message that Proclus discovers in this passage. It is a reminder that we have to despise matter in general and that we have to turn ourselves around to our true selves and to the intelligible world instead. Proclus points out that the fact that names reveal something about the soul of a person, not so much about his body, is an indication that our being is located in our soul (τὸ εἶναι ἡμῶν ἐν ψυχῇ), not in our body (οὐκ ἐν σώμασι).<sup>98</sup> This, however, is not the only moral lesson that can be learnt from this passage.<sup>99</sup> In the cases of the etymologies of the names of Orestes, Agamemnon and Atreus (*In Crat.* XCII), one may learn about good and bad forms of honor and revenge. Proclus assumes that the three men were dominated by the θυμοειδής part of their soul. However, whereas it drives Agamemnon to attack his natural enemies, the barbarians, it makes Orestes and Atreus turn against their own kin. Proclus gets much more out of these etymologies than Plato. Plato (*Crat.* 395a–b) explains the name Ἀγαμέμνων from the fact that he is admirable for his steadfastness (ἀγαστὸς κατὰ τὴν ἐπιμονήν), i.e. for his long siege of Troy, whereas Atreus’ name refers to his crimes against Chrysippus and Thyestes, which were ruinous to his virtue (ἀτηρὰ πρὸς ἀρετήν).<sup>100</sup> In other words, Plato does not suggest some kind of unifying theme. Proclus, on the other hand, connects the explanations of these names to the famous psychology from the *Republic*. There, good soldiers are compared to good dogs. Their θυμοειδής part is strongly developed and therefore they make brave warriors. At the same time they have some sort of intuition, which allows them to distinguish friend from foe. They will protect the former, yet attack the latter as Agamemnon does when he wages war against the hostile foreigners (cf. *R.* 375d–376a). Orestes and Thyestes, on the other hand, do not make this distinction and, because of their unchecked θυμοειδής part, attack their own people.

The reader’s moral education is continued by the discussion of the names of Pelops and Tantalus (*Crat.* 395c–e). Once again, Proclus places the etymologies from the *Cratylus* in a larger (Neo)Platonic context. According to the *Cratylus*, the name of Pelops refers to the fact that he

<sup>98</sup> *In Crat.* XCI.

<sup>99</sup> *In Crat.* XCII p. 46, 4–5. “Ὅτι καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἦθος ἡμᾶς ὀνίνησιν ὁ θεῖος Πλάτων ἐν τούτοις.

<sup>100</sup> For the explanation of the name of Orestes from τὸ ὀρεινόν (*Crat.* 394e), see **T. 4.16** above.

only paid attention to what was at hand (πέλας): in his attempts to marry Hippodameia, he killed Myrtilus without considering the devastating consequences for himself and his offspring. Proclus turns this into a warning not to look too much to the φαινόμενα. We should not pay too much attention to human affairs, but instead focuses on the divine and on virtue. Proclus reads the same admonition to direct our attention to the divine world into the etymology of the name Tantalus. Tantalus, the son of Zeus, represents the human soul who has descended from the hall of Zeus, i.e. from the intellection of the intelligible.<sup>101</sup> Once the soul has fallen down into this realm of matter, it becomes obsessed with the material world. Just as Tantalus has his comeuppance, the human soul is punished too: the divine fruits of the contemplation of the intelligible are denied to him. The implicit lesson of Proclus to his students is clear: forget about the grammarian and his discussions of syllables. The thing that matters is the form of a name. Your form is your soul. Therefore forget about matter in general, look at your own soul, look at your innate forms. From there turn to the hall of Zeus, the divine Intellect, the Demiurge of the universe and first name-maker, and his world of intelligible Forms. This divine name-makes and his relation to us humans will be the topic of the next chapter.

#### 9. *Proclus on the correctness of names: some conclusions*

From this chapter and the previous one it emerges that Proclus holds a very subtle view on the issue of the correctness of names. It all has to do with the question of how names are related to reality. Proclus, with Plato, assumes that names are on principle a sort of definitions of the things to which they refer. This becomes apparent when one etymologizes these names. They both assume furthermore that these definitions should be expressions of real knowledge. Real knowledge, for a Platonist, is knowledge of the eternal Forms. Therefore, only the philosopher is qualified to give names. As we have seen, Plato did not believe that the first name-givers were in fact philosophers. He had therefore little faith in etymology as a means of philosophical investigation. With Proclus this is completely different. Language appears to be quite stable. This stability can be explained from the fact that

---

<sup>101</sup> For the 'hall of Zeus' (ἡ τοῦ Διὸς αὐλή) as the place from which the souls come and to which they will eventually return, see Van den Berg 2001: 177.

language is akin to its primary objects, the eternal beings. Therefore, language is basically correct by nature, i.e. it provides a reliable image of metaphysical reality. The prototypes of these names are the names of the gods. The gods are by definition immortal and eternal. Their names display the same sort of permanency. Since they are holy, no-one would dare to change them. Proclus thus feels free to throw Plato's warning to the winds not to investigate the things through their names. As we shall see in chapter six, this is precisely what he does in the case of divine names.

In the case of the things down here in the material realm of change, we should distinguish between two types of things. On the one hand, there are the things that participate in the Forms. These derive both their existence and their name from the Form that causes them. In this case too the name is an image of its object and has therefore a natural correctness. Proclus distinguishes this type of correctness from another form of correctness, that of the correct use of the name. According to the *Cratylus* the name-giver gives the names that he makes on the basis of his expert knowledge to his community to use. The lay person will not be able to give a scientific definition of 'horse' and is therefore unable to really understand what the word 'horse' means, yet he has learnt from others that we call this particular animal here a horse, i.e. he has learnt it by having been shown a stereotype of the species.<sup>102</sup>

The names of eternal things and the temporary things that depend on them should be distinguished from the things that only exist as particulars. The prototype of these is the name of the individual. Since it is impossible to know individuals in a scientific way, we are unable to give them naturally correct names. The correctness of these names therefore depends on imposition and convention, comparable to S. Kripke's well-known theory of initial baptism. Proclus thus makes

---

<sup>102</sup> These are two of the three senses of ἐλληνίζειν that Proclus distinguishes, see pp. 89–91. Interestingly, this aspect of Proclus' theory recalls H. Putnam's "division of linguistic labor". In his essay "The Meaning of "Meaning"", Putnam 1975: 223–230 argues that everyone to whom water is important for any reason has to acquire the word 'water'. However, not everybody has to acquire the method of recognizing if something is or is not water. This is the task of a certain class of experts. They know, for example, that the chemical formula of water is H<sub>2</sub>O and are thus able to distinguish it from other transparent, odourless, and tasteless liquids, which a lay person would all call water. There are, thus Putnam, two ways in which a lay person may learn what one means by a natural-kind term such as 'water'. One may give him either a description of it, or, as Proclus seems to suggest, a so-called ostensive definition: "this (liquid) is water".

explicit the rather implicit suggestion in the *Cratylus* that there exists a difference between personal names and common nouns. This distinction may recall more recent discussions about naming,<sup>103</sup> yet no sooner has Proclus drawn this distinction, or he tries to smooth it over. It may be that *we* are unable to give naturally correct names to our children, yet chance, a daemonic power, sees to it that these names in some unexpected way appear to be appropriate after all. All of a sudden we are back from contemporary linguistic concerns to the magical universe of Late Antiquity.

Proclus' theory of names is a truly Platonic one. It presupposes both a Platonic ontology (the existence of intelligible Forms) and a Platonic epistemology (true knowledge is knowledge of these Forms). Whereas most Neoplatonists seek to smooth over differences between Plato and Aristotle, Proclus follows the example of Plotinus. The latter not only stresses the differences between Plato and Aristotle but also calls attention to the flaws in Aristotle's philosophy, which he explains from the latter's rejection of Platonic metaphysics. Proclus both here and in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* likewise insists on the difference between (his interpretation of) Plato's semantic theory and that of Aristotle and tries to demonstrate that the theory of Aristotle is self-refuting. He explains the failure of Aristotle's and Hermogenes' theory from the fact that they focus on the names of particulars in the sensible world. Therefore they assume that the all names are like the personal names of individuals, which are indeed a product of convention. Had they focussed on the names of the eternal beings instead, they would have found that those names express the nature of their objects and that these are the names that play a role in philosophical discourse. In the next chapter, we shall find further illustrations of Proclus' critical attitude towards Aristotle and his philosophy.

---

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., Searle 1969: 162–174 who, in the footsteps of J.S. Mill, argues that there are no definitions of proper names in contrast to predicative expressions such as “man”. Leaving divine proper names aside, this distinction is not unlike that of Proclus.





## CHAPTER FIVE

### PROCLUS' *COMMENTARY ON THE CRATYLUS* (II): NAMING, DIALECTIC, AND THE DIVINE INTELLECT

#### 1. *Introduction*

From the two previous chapters it has emerged that Proclus' semantic theory is intrinsically linked to his metaphysics: correctly established names are first and foremost names of metaphysical entities. It is precisely because human language is rooted in the metaphysical realm that Platonic dialectic is possible. For this reason, Proclus finds fault with the Aristotelian semantic theory that connects names first and foremost with our experiences of the physical world. In this chapter, we shall take a closer look at this relation between language, dialectic, and the metaphysical realm. First, we shall consider Proclus' discussion of the logical or dialectical character of the *Cratylus*. Proclus claims that Platonic dialectic is superior to Aristotelian dialectic because of its subject, the Forms. For this reason, Proclus believes that Platonic dialectic is not a mere human invention but that it originates at the level of the Forms. The divine Intellect that contemplates these Forms is the first Dialectician. Human dialectic thus consists in the imitation of a divine activity. Likewise, there exists a divine name-giver, whom Proclus identifies with another divine Intellect, the Platonic Demiurge, the divine craftsman who creates the material universe in the image of the intelligible world. Proclus compares human name-giving to this creation. Both fashion images made of some stuff, be it matter of sound, of immaterial contemplations of the Forms. Our capacity to make correct names thus reveals that the human soul harbors divine powers.

#### 2. *The dialectical character of the Cratylus (In Crat. II–IX)*

One of the set elements of the ancient prolegomena to commentaries on Plato was a discussion of the so-called character of the dialogue under discussion. As we have seen, the Middle Platonists assumed that

the *Cratylus* was logical or dialectical in character.<sup>1</sup> Proclus accepts this characterization, yet his version of the dialectical art differs much from that of, e.g., Alcinous. Whereas the latter had combined Aristotelian with Platonic dialectic,<sup>2</sup> Proclus argues that we should draw a sharp distinction between the two. He compares the two forms of dialectic in the prolegomena of his commentary when he discusses the issue of the character of the dialogue.

**T. 5.1** That the *Cratylus* is logical and dialectical, not, however, in the manner of Peripatetic dialectical methods, which are unrelated to reality (ψιλὰς τῶν πραγμάτων μεθόδους διαλεκτικὰς), but in the manner of the great Plato. The latter knew that dialectic fits only those with a perfectly purified thinking faculty (διάνοιαν), educated in mathematics, purified from the juvenile features of their characters through the virtues, those, in short, who have truly worked on philosophy. This sort of dialectic is said by him to be the “capstone of mathematics” (Plato *R.* 534e) and to lead us upwards to the one cause of all things, the Good, and “to have been brought to humanity from the gods by Prometheus together with the brightest fire” (*Phlb.* 16c). For the analytical method of the Peripatos, and its main part, demonstration, are easy to master and very clear for everybody who is not completely confused and has not drunk much water from river Lethe (*In Crat.* II p. 1, 10–2, 4).

Aristotle’s dialectic is presented here as a trite affaire. The crucial difference between his and that of Plato is that whereas Aristotelian dialectic is just a method “unrelated to reality”, Platonic dialectic cannot be separated from the objects with which it deals, i.e. the Forms. Consequently, whereas Aristotle’s theory of demonstration as described in the first book of the *Posterior Analytics* may be learned by anyone who has little brain, Platonic dialectic requires of its practitioners that they prepare themselves to contemplate true being by purifying their characters and intellect through the study of mathematics as described in book VII of the *Republic*.

Obviously, one will look in vain for this dismissive attitude towards Aristotelian logic in Porphyry and the many other Neoplatonists who had done commentaries on the Aristotelian *Organon*. As we have seen, however, Plotinus, unlike these Neoplatonists, had been less favorably disposed towards Aristotle.<sup>3</sup> Proclus, it appeared, had inherited Plotinus’

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 37–38.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 41.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 64–66.

critical attitude towards the Stagirite. Thus, it need not surprise us to find that Proclus when distinguishing between Aristotelian and Platonic dialectic follows closely in the footsteps of Plotinus. In *Enn.* I 3 [20] (*On Dialectic*) describes how a prospective philosopher has to start his career by studying mathematics and perfecting his virtues.<sup>4</sup> Next, he brings up the “so-called logic activity about propositions and syllogisms”, i.e. Aristotelian logic. This, Plotinus says, has as little to do with Platonic dialectic as the art of writing has.<sup>5</sup> Even though it may be necessary to master these before turning to philosophy, they are not, contrary to Platonic dialectic, a part of philosophy.<sup>6</sup> The Athenian Neoplatonists were of the same mind, for in their educational program Aristotelian logic featured likewise as a preparation for the study of philosophy proper.<sup>7</sup> The *Cratylus*, on the other hand, was not even among the first of Plato’s dialogues to be read. Since dialectic requires a purified mind, Iamblichus’ curriculum demanded that it was studied after the *Gorgias*, a dialogue about politics and political virtue, and the *Phaedo*, a dialogue about purification and purifying virtue (i.e. the separation of the soul from the body). These prepared the student for the study of τὰ ὅντα, which were for the first time presented in the *Cratylus* and the *Theaetetus*.<sup>8</sup> To put it in Proclus’ own words, Plato in the *Cratylus* “presents the principles (ἀρχαί) of reality (τὰ ὅντα) and of dialectic, when he

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Enn.* I 3 [20] 3.

<sup>5</sup> *Enn.* I 3 [20] 4, 18–23.

<sup>6</sup> Plotinus *On Dialectic*: “Are dialectic and philosophy the same? It is the valuable part of philosophy. For it must not be thought to be a tool the philosopher uses. It is not just bare theories and rules; it deals with things and has real beings as a kind of material for its activity” (*Enn.* I 3 [20] 5, 8–12; trans. Armstrong). Proclus too calls dialectic a ‘part of philosophy’, see, e.g., *In Crat.* IV p. 2, 21: μέρος φιλοσοφίας). The question whether Aristotelian logic was a part of philosophy or merely an instrument of it was much debated by the ancient commentators on Aristotle’s *Organon*; for the relevant texts and secondary literature on this topic, see Sorabji 2004 (vol. III) 32–36 (“Is logic a part or an instrument of philosophy?”).

<sup>7</sup> Marinus *Proclus* § 9 reports that Proclus as a young student in Alexandria, easily learnt the logical treatises of Aristotle by heart, even though these are extremely difficult texts. On this passage, see the translation and commentary by Saffrey-Segonds 2001; for what this and other texts tell us about Proclus’ relation to Aristotle, see Saffrey 1990 (1987): 178–179.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Prolegomena* X 26, 34–39 ed. Westerink 1990: “Then (i.e. after the *Phaedo*, RvdB) we come to the knowledge of beings, which is acquired through theoretical virtue; this reality is observed either in thoughts or in things; after the dialogues mentioned we should therefore read, fourth, the *Cratylus*, which teaches about words, then the *Theaetetus*, which is about things” (trans. Westerink adapted). On the curriculum, cf. chapter three § 4.2.

presents the names together with the things of which they are names”.<sup>9</sup> Proclus assumes that Plato does so in the etymological section of the dialogue. Like the Middle Platonists before him,<sup>10</sup> Proclus believes that these etymologies offer some sort of definition (ὀρισμός). Since definition is one of the four procedures of dialectic, the etymological section can be seen both as a demonstration of a dialectical technique and as a first course on the nature of things.<sup>11</sup>

The study of reality that begins with the *Cratylus* eventually culminates in the *Parmenides*. Proclus explicitly compares the two dialogues to each other. Just as the *Cratylus* offers us a discussion of names as the most elementary parts of dialectic in combination with knowledge about the bearers of those names, in the same manner the *Parmenides* offers “the whole dialectical art, however not in isolation (ψιλήν), but together with the study of reality (τὰ ὄντα)”.<sup>12</sup> Proclus’ remark hints at the dispute over the correct interpretation of the *Parmenides*. From his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, we know that there existed a Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* according to which the *Parmenides* is just an exercise in dialectical gymnastics for the young. Proclus for whom, as for all Neoplatonists, the *Parmenides* was Plato’s ultimate dialogue about metaphysics, and hence of unparalleled importance, comes down with full force on this interpretation. Plato, thus Proclus, never produced a work that is principally a study of method. A method may be a necessary means for gaining knowledge of things (περὶ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιστήμην), it is, however, “not worthy of earnest attention for its own sake”.<sup>13</sup> In the next chapter, we shall examine in greater detail how Proclus sees the relation between these two dialogues.

Proclus (**T. 5.1**) stresses the special nature of Platonic dialectic further by quoting from Plato’s *Philebus*, which praises dialectic as a gift from the gods brought to us by Prometheus. Proclus takes this rather literally: since Platonic dialectic cannot be seen in separation from the Platonic

<sup>9</sup> *In Crat.* VIII p. 3, 4–6.

<sup>10</sup> On the Middle Platonists, see pp. 38–41.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* IX: dialectic consists of four procedures (in descending order of importance: division, definition, demonstration, and analysis); even though the study of names is especially useful in defining things (p. 3, 11–19), names may play a role in the three other procedures as well, as can be illustrated with examples from Plato (pp. 3, 25–4, 5).

<sup>12</sup> *In Crat.* VII pp. 2, 28–3, 3.

<sup>13</sup> See *In Parm.* I 637, 4–19 (trans. Morrow-Dillon); cf., e.g., Proclus *In Alc.* 8, 1–4 for the same idea. For Proclus’ rejection of this Middle Platonic interpretation of the *Parmenides*, see Steel 1997b.

Forms, it is reasonable to look at the level of the Forms for the origin of dialectic. According to him the divine Intellect is “the projector of (Platonic) dialectic”.<sup>14</sup> Just as the divine Intellect contemplates the transcendent Forms themselves directly, so the human dialectician studies the innate Forms in his own soul. Since naming is part of dialectic, it is logical to assume that divine Intellect is also the ‘projector’ of naming. This is indeed the case as we are about to see.

### 3. *The human legislator / name-giver and the divine Demiurge*

#### 3.1 The image-making power of the human soul (*In Crat.* LI)

After Socrates has established that a name is an instrument for teaching and dividing, he interrogates Hermogenes about its maker (*Crat.* 388c9–389a4). Proclus discusses the topic of the name-giver and the art of name-making in *In Crat.* LI.<sup>15</sup> On the basis of this passage, he tries to show that the products of the human name-maker are analogous to those of the Platonic Demiurge since both names and the material cosmos are external, material images of the internal, immaterial thoughts of their makers.

Proclus starts his discussion by focusing on the ‘image-making power’ (εἰκαστική δύναμις) of the human soul that manifests itself in figurative arts such as painting.<sup>16</sup> Yet, Proclus is not interested in our artistic potential, but in what he calls the assimilative (ἀφομοιωτικός) aspect<sup>17</sup> of the image-making power that allows us to make something inferior into the image of something superior, hence assimilating the inferior to the superior. Proclus gives two examples of this type of assimilation:

**T. 5.2** Because of this power the soul can make itself like the gods angels and daemons that are superior to it (ἐξομοιοῦν τοῖς κρείττοσιν ἑαυτῆς θεοῖς ἀγγέλοις δαίμοσιν). But also it makes inferior beings that originate from itself like itself because of this power, and even like what is superior to itself. It therefore crafts statues (ἀγάλματα) of gods and daemons (*In Crat.* LI p. 19, 4–8).

<sup>14</sup> *In Crat.* III p. 2, 5: “Ὅτι νοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ τῆς διαλεκτικῆς προβολεύς. Ὁν προβάλλειν as a Neoplatonic technical term for causation, cf. I. & P. Hadot 2004: 65–66. Once again Plotinus *On Dialectic* provides a close parallel. On the question where the principles of dialectic come from, he replies: “Intellect gives the clear principles to any soul that can receive them” (*Enn.* I 3 [20] 5, 1–2).

<sup>15</sup> *In Crat.* LI p. 18, 27f.: Τίς δὲ τῶν ὀνομάτων ποιητικὴ τέχνη, συντόμως εἶπωμεν.

<sup>16</sup> *Crat.* 430d10–11 explicitly compares names to paintings.

<sup>17</sup> *In Crat.* LI p. 19, 2.

The first example shows that the power that allows us to make names is not an insignificant one. In the Platonic tradition becoming like god, (ἐξ)ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ, is the ultimate aim of the human life.<sup>18</sup> For Proclus, as for Plato, to become like god means primarily to become like the divine Intellect. This we achieve by doing philosophy. Elsewhere in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus says that Athena, the patron deity of philosophy, “establishes everything in the harbor of the Father”, i.e. by doing philosophy we imitate the divine Intellect and thus elevate ourselves towards it.<sup>19</sup> It is, I think, no coincidence that Proclus here refers to the theme of assimilation to the divine Intellect. As we shall see, this divine Intellect is the divine Demiurge, who is also the first name-giver. When we give philosophically sound names based on our contemplation of the Forms, we imitate the divine Demiurge. Thus the very activity of naming makes us like God.

As an example of the soul’s ability to make what is inferior to itself like something superior to itself, Proclus refers to the statues of the gods. We have already encountered the comparison of these statues to divine names,<sup>20</sup> but here Proclus takes things a step further by comparing them to a special type of statues, i.e. animated statues fashioned by theurgists:

**T. 5.3** And just as theurgy by means of certain symbols and ineffable tokens (συμβόλων καὶ ἀπορρήτων συνθημάτων) makes the statues here into images of the gods and makes them suitable for the reception of the illuminations from the gods, in the same manner the legislative art too by means of that same assimilative power makes names into statues of the things, making images of the nature of things by means of such and such sounds (τοίων καὶ τοίων ἤχων ἀπεικονιζομένη τὴν τῶν ὄντων φύσιν), and once it had fashioned these, it handed them over to the people to use.... And for that reason the legislator is said to be the master of the generation of names, and just as it is not reverent to transgress against the statues of the gods, so it is not lawful to sin regarding their names. For intellect is the legislative craftsman of these, which places images of their models in them.<sup>21</sup> And we must revere them because of their kinship to the gods (πρὸς θεοὺς αὐτῶν συγγένειαν) (*In Crat.* LI p. 19, 12–24).

<sup>18</sup> See Sedley 2000 for a treatment of the theme in Plato; cf. Van den Berg 2003 for a discussion of the same theme in Proclus.

<sup>19</sup> *In Crat.* CLXXXV p. 113, 1–2. For the image of the paternal harbour, see Van den Berg 2001: 51–56.

<sup>20</sup> See pp. 110–111.

<sup>21</sup> Given the context, I take it that the intellect mentioned here is the intellect of the human name-giver.

As is well known, Neoplatonists from Iamblichus onwards, including Proclus, practiced theurgy, i.e. magical rituals as a way to get in touch with the divine.<sup>22</sup> In these rituals so-called *symbola* played an important role: these were certain animals, plants, and stones that were believed to be sacred to specific gods and when added to a statue of that god, they would help to attract the powers of that god. Here these symbols are compared to the sounds that make up a name. I take this to refer to the theory of ‘first names’ discussed in *Crat.* 426b ff., according to which the most primitive simple names from which all other names have been constructed are certain sounds which represent certain qualities.<sup>23</sup> It has been suggested that Proclus here intends to say that names function like theurgical statues in that they too attract divine powers and that by just pronouncing them we may attract divine illumination.<sup>24</sup> This, however, is a wrong reading of this passage. It may be true that names may function as theurgical symbols—provided that they are used in the appropriate context, for example in a hymn or a prayer—that call up an epiphany but that this is not what Proclus says here. His point is that in both cases an artificial man-made thing reveals a deity (cf. the description of a name as a revealing instrument, chapter four § 7.6). However, a statue does so by actually summoning the presence of the deity, a name just describes the deity’s nature. Thus, a name reveals the knowledge of the name-giver about a god, not the god himself.

---

<sup>22</sup> On Neoplatonic theurgy, see, e.g., Van den Berg 2001: 66–85 (“The theory behind theurgy”) on symbols, see esp. pp. 79–81; for relevant texts and secondary literature, see further Sorabji 2004 (I): 381–390 (“theurgy”).

<sup>23</sup> See p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Hirschle 1979: 12–19 (note the telling title of his book: *Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie*) and more recently Rappe 2000: 167–196. See, e.g., *o.c.* p. 184: “What does it mean for an interpretation to say that language is rooted in the nature of the One and that all language is a ramification of the two great names for the One, that is, for the One and the Good? An astonishingly radical view of language is at work in this theory. Proclus here reveals nothing short of a pathway to God, based upon the way of invocation. If the deepest roots of language can be traced back to the One (...), language cannot fail to have theurgic value. The names of the gods that Proclus recites in the *Platonic Theology* have no conceptual equivalents.... Therefore, to interpret the text is to invoke these names. But what follows from this invocation? The language of the *Platonic Theology* is a language of vision.” I cannot agree with anything of this. As we have seen, language is not rooted in the One but in Intellect. Divine names are based on our innate knowledge of the gods, so there are in fact conceptual equivalents to these names. Furthermore, I harbour serious doubts whether the *Theologia Platonica* is a theurgical text. According to *Theol. Plat.* I 5 p. 25, 18–23, to be discussed below (pp. 174–175), we learn in the *Cratylus* and other dialogues gods about their properties by means of *intellectual reasoning* (τῷ λογισμῷ) about their names, quite the opposite of invocation and vision.



This interpretation is supported by Proclus' discussion of divine names as a source of theological wisdom in *Theologia Platonica* I 29:

**T. 5.4** And just as theurgy by means of certain symbols calls forth the ungrudging goodness of the gods in order to illuminate the artificial statues of the gods, in the same way the intellectual knowledge of the divine (ἡ νοερὰ τῶν θεῶν ἐπιστήμη) reveals (ἐκφαίνει) the hidden essence of the gods by means of the compositions and divisions of sounds (*Theol. Plat.* I 29 pp. 124, 23–125, 2).

We may thus conclude that the image-making power of the human soul, the power that we use when we make names, has to be associated with our intellect, our ability to know the metaphysical truth. Our intellect is, of course, an emanation of the divine Intellect, who is also the archetypal name-giver. Therefore this knowledge is holy. Hence Proclus' remark (**T. 5.3**) that it is "not lawful to sin regarding names" of the gods because intellect, i.e. our faculty for knowledge is the legislative craftsman of names.

### 3.2 The demiurgical Intellect as name-giver (*In Crat.* LI continued)

Proclus identifies the divine name-giving Intellect with Plato's Demiurge on the basis of a remark by Socrates in the *Cratylus* that the name-giver is both the rarest among the craftsmen (δημιουργῶν σπανιώτατος) and a legislator (νομοθέτης) who establishes names by law (νόμος). Proclus assumes that Socrates describes the name-giver as a craftsman and legislator since his function is analogous to that of the Demiurge, whom Plato in the *Timaeus* describes as a legislator who sets the 'laws of Fate' (*Ti.* 41e2–3), the one who 'ordains all things' (*Ti.* 42d2–3).<sup>25</sup> Proclus continues:

**T. 5.5** It is he, as Timaeus says, who named one of the circuits (i.e. of the soul, RvdB) 'the Same' and one 'the Different'. If, then, the legislator is analogous (ἀναλογόν) to him, won't you say that he must also

<sup>25</sup> *In Crat.* LI p. 19, 24–26: καί μοι δοκεῖ τὸν 'νομοθέτην' ὁ Πλάτων ἀνάλογον ἰδρῶν τῷ ὅλῳ δημιουργῷ. On the relation of the legislator to divine Intellect, see the discussion of Neoplatonic ideas about legislation in O'Meara 2003: 94–98, who notes that "Plato's play on the word 'law' (νόμος) as a 'disposition of intellect' (τοῦ νοῦ διανομή, *Laws* 714a1–2) is cited by Proclus as if it were a definition of law and he infers that legislative science is a kind of particular intellect, in other words that this law is a determination of reason deriving from, and subordinate to, transcendent divine Intellect" (p. 98). On divine Intellect as legislator, cf. Van den Berg 2005.

have the authority to impose names? This is why Plato here called the legislator ‘craftsman’ (δημιουργός) and ‘rarest of the craftsmen’ (*In Crat.* LI p. 20, 2–7).

Proclus refers to the passage in the *Timaeus* that describes the creation of the World Soul. From the ‘soulstuff’ which the Demiurge has just mixed, he makes two circuits which he names ‘Same’ and ‘Different’:

**T. 5.6** τὴν μὲν οὖν ἕξω φορὰν ἐπεφήμισεν εἶναι τῆς ταύτοῦ φύσεως, τὴν δ' ἐντὸς τῆς θατέρου (Plato *Ti.* 36c4–5)

The outer circuit he *named* the movement of the Same; the inner, the movement of the Different. (trans. Cornford).

In his *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Proclus has this to say about this passage:

**T. 5.7** And what concerns ‘ἐπεφήμισε’ (‘he named’), he uses it extremely appropriately in the present context. For since the names of the circuits are based on their dominant element, ‘ἐπεφήμισε’ makes it clear that that they were not named after their substance as a whole, but that they were named after their dominant part (ἐπωνυμία). And the fact that the names were given after the creation makes it clear that true names aim at the nature of things. For the Demiurge did not name the not (yet) existent circuit of the Same in this way, but the circuit of such a kind that he had made. Or rather, its creation contains the truest cause of its name and the imposition of a name is its creation, if indeed intellection at that level is not separated from creation, but if the gods create by means of intellection itself. For in this way they create the things just by naming them (*In Tim.* II 255, 12–24).

Thus, the Demiurge clearly works in accordance with the rules of correct naming laid down in the *Cratylus*: he names the things after their characteristic quality, thus defining them. His job as a name-giver actually coincides with that as Craftsman of the universe: according to Proclus, on the level of the Demiurge, naming a thing is actually creating it. What does he mean by this? As **T. 5.7** brings out, there is a close relation between intellection, creation, and naming, a recurrent motive in the Platonic tradition. It takes its inspiration from certain passages in Plato that stress the close relation between thought and language. According to Plato *Sph.* 263e3–5, e.g., thought and speech are one and the same thing (οὐκοῦν διάνοια μὲν καὶ λόγος ταυτόν): thought is a *monologue intérieur* of the soul without sound, speech its outward expression. According to Plato *Tht.* 206d 1–5, we express our thoughts in names and phrases, casting an image of it “on the stream that flows from the mouth, as if in a mirror or in water”. Later

Platonists compare the relation of thought and speech to intellect and soul. Plotinus, e.g., picks up on the latter passage when he writes that whereas the thought itself stays within, speech (λόγος) unfolds its content, hands it to the ‘image-making power’ and thus shows that thought as if “in a mirror”.<sup>26</sup> Plotinus goes on to describe the relation of intellect to soul as analogous to that of soul to speech. Universal Soul is the outward expression of the internal thoughts of the hypostasis Intellect, just as speech is the outward expression of the internal thoughts of the individual soul.<sup>27</sup> Since this Intellect is the universal Demiurge who by contemplating the intelligible Forms produces not just Soul but also the entire material universe, it is only a small step to consider the creation of the latter as the external, speech-like expression of the internal thoughts of Intellect.

This connection between speaking and creation is made explicit by Proclus when he comments on the speech (λόγος) given by the Demiurge in which the latter instructs the so-called young gods—about whom more later—to do their part in the creation of the world by completing the creation the mortal species which the Demiurge himself had begun. Proclus comments:

**T. 5.8** For he himself begins first with the creation of these as well and he creates them by means of speaking only—for the words of the Father are the demiurgical thoughts and his thoughts are acts of creation. And he leaves the subsequent creation to the many (sc. gods, i.e. the young gods, RvdB) (*In Tim.* III 222, 2–5).

In other words, just as our speech and naming are utterances in sound, i.e. in a material form, of our immaterial thoughts, and particularly

<sup>26</sup> Plotinus *Enn.* IV 3 [27] 30, 7–10: Τὸ μὲν γὰρ νόημα ἀμερὲς καὶ οὐπω οἶον προελλυθὸς εἰς τὸ ἔξω ἔνδον ὃν λανθάνει, ὁ δὲ λόγος ἀναπτύξας καὶ ἐπάγων ἐκ τοῦ νοήματος εἰς τὸ φανταστικὸν ἔδειξε τὸ νόημα οἶον ἐν κατόπτρῳ. For the role of τὸ φανταστικόν, the ‘image-making faculty’ in the production of speech, cf. Proclus *In Crat.* LI p. 19, 10–11, where names are presented as a product of the assimilative power of the soul assisted by its verbal imagination (χρωμένη τῇ λεκτικῇ φαντασίᾳ συνεργῶ).

<sup>27</sup> Plotinus *Enn.* V 1 [10] 3, 7–9: (ψυχῇ) εἰκὼν τίς ἐστὶ νοῦ· οἶον λόγος ὁ ἐν προφορᾷ λόγου τοῦ ἐν ψυχῇ, οὕτω τοι καὶ αὐτὴ λόγος νοῦ καὶ ἡ πᾶσα ἐνέργεια καὶ ἡν προίεται ζῶν εἰς ἄλλον ὑπόστασιν. As has been noted (e.g. by Henry-Schwyzler in their *apparatus* and Armstrong in his Loeb edition), Plotinus here refers to the distinction made by the Stoics between the λόγος προφορικός and the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος (the thought in the mind), cf. *SVF* II 135. This holds true for the terminology, but, as we have seen, the distinction itself can be traced back to Plato. Porphyry *Abst.* III 3 observes in this regard that this is a generally accepted distinction that does not depend on any school, but on the concept of *logos* itself.

of our contemplation of our innate Forms, in the same way the entire physical cosmos may be seen as an utterance cast in matter of the contemplation by the Demiurge of the Intelligible Forms. In both cases these utterances are images of thoughts. According to Plato *Ti.* 29e1–3, the Demiurge makes the material cosmos a moving likeness (ὅμοιον πρὸς τὸ παράδειγμα) of the eternal intelligible realm, thus creating an ἄγαλμα of the eternal gods (*Ti.* 37c6–d2).<sup>28</sup> Proclus in the *Platonic Theology* argues that this image-making power of the Demiurge constitutes a self-contained class of gods, “directly connected to him”, yet “essentially different from him”.<sup>29</sup> These are the so-called leading gods (οἱ ἡγεμονικοὶ θεοί), also known as the assimilative gods (οἱ ἀφομοιωματοῖκοι θεοί) after their most distinctive characteristic.<sup>30</sup> Thus, our power to make likenesses is in fact a divine power.

Proclus explicitly draws the comparison between divine creation and human naming in *Theol. Plat.* I 29, the chapter in which he discusses the role of divine names in the construction of a Platonic theology:

**T. 5.9** For just as the demiurgical Intellect brings into existence reflections in matter of the first Forms contained in himself, and produces temporal images of eternal things, and divided ones of undivided things, and *trompe-l'oeil* pictures of true beings, in the same manner, I think, our knowledge creates by means of speech likenesses of things and particularly of the gods in imitation of the intellectual creation, depicting their uncomposed nature through composition, their simplicity through variety, and the united nature through multitude (*Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 124, 12–20).

As we shall see below when we come to discuss the role of the young gods in the creation of the world and in the imposition of names, we should not take the idea that the Demiurge creates “reflections in matter” too literally. He does not himself create the things in the physical world out of matter—this is precisely the task of the young gods—rather he provides the formative principles, the Forms that are present in the material cosmos as opposed to the intelligible Forms contemplated by the Demiurge that remain untouched by matter in the intelligible realm. Since things are called after their Forms, the same Form that is responsible for the horses in this physical cosmos is also the Form that

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* VI 3 p. 15, 7–14 and *Theol. Plat.* VI 3 p. 16, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Proclus *Theol. Plat.* VI 3 p. 16, 2–6.

<sup>30</sup> On these gods, see *Theol. Plat.* VI 1–5; in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus does not draw such subtle theological distinctions between the Demiurge and his image-making power.

has to be expressed in their name, if their name is going to be a correct name at all. This is what Proclus means in **T. 5.7** when he says that the creation of a thing by the Demiurge—when the Demiurge brings forth its Form from the intelligible realm—also “contains the truest cause of its name and the imposition of a name is creation.”

### 3.3 Additional proof from the *Chaldaean Oracles* (*In Crat.* LII)

As Proclus himself admits, the indication from the *Timaeus* that the Demiurge is both the creator of the physical universe as well as the first name-giver is just a small one.<sup>31</sup> As he often does, Proclus now backs up his interpretation of Plato by comparing it to the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which were associated with theurgy and which hence enjoyed an immense authority with many of the Neoplatonists after Plotinus. This type of comparative approach is typical of the Athenian Neoplatonists. They put a lot of energy into showing that what they perceived of as the most important theological traditions, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Plato, but also Orpheus, and Pythagoras were in harmony with each other and therefore true.<sup>32</sup> The relevant verses, which—Proclus assures us—come from the gods themselves, are:

**T. 5.10** But a holy name (ὅνομα σεμνὸν), in restless motion, / leaps into the *cosmoi* at the hasty command of the Father<sup>33</sup>

**T. 5.11** For the Paternal Intellect has sown symbols (σύμβολα) throughout the cosmos, / who (viz. the Intellect) thinks the intelligibles. And these (intelligibles) are called inexpressible beauties.<sup>34</sup>

In the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, at least in the version that we have, Proclus does not comment on these oracles. Yet something more can be

<sup>31</sup> *In Crat.* LII p. 20, 25f.: ἐπὶ βραχὺ ὁ Τίμαιος ἐνεδείξατο.

<sup>32</sup> On this aspect of Athenian Neoplatonism, cf. Saffrey 1992. Proclus' attempt to claim Pythagoras' as the intellectual father of the Platonic semantic theory (see chapter four § 5 above) should be understood in the same context.

<sup>33</sup> Frg. 87 (= Proclus *In Crat.* LII p. 20, 29–31; trans. after Majercik 1989: 82).

<sup>34</sup> Frg. 108 (= Proclus *In Crat.* LII p. 21, 1–2; trans. after Majercik 1989: 90) reading ὅς with Des Places (ὅς Pasquali). Note that Proclus' identification of the Paternal Intellect with the Demiurge is at odds with the original theological system of the *Chaldaean Oracles*. In this system this Intellect is not the Demiurgical Intellect, to which the *Oracles* refer as the second Intellect, but one superior to the latter, the first Intellect. This first Intellect thinks the Forms, the intelligible model of the physical universe. For a reconstruction of the theology of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, see Brisson 2003; for the first Intellect and Fr. 108, see esp. *o.c.* pp. 114–117. Proclus sticks to his erroneous interpretation in the passage from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* discussed above.

said about his interpretation of the second oracle, for in his *Commentary on the Timaeus* Proclus works out its soteriological implications: the Demiurge has placed these *symbols* in the human soul as signs of the gods which allow us to attract their beneficence.<sup>35</sup> As L. Brisson explains: “the recognition of these symbols is equivalent to the soul’s perception of the Intelligible, in a process equivalent to that of reminiscence in the *Phaedrus*.” The ascending soul has to use these remembered symbols as some kind of password to gain access to the Paternal Intellect (Fr. 109). “Thus, the universe appears as a vast system of signs and marks, which enables communication between souls and all gods, including, above all, the first.”<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, in the Chaldaean rituals such things as plants and minerals could be used as symbols, but as the first *Oracle* suggests, a special role was reserved for divine names.<sup>37</sup> In a similar vein, Proclus *In Alc.* 150 remarks that according to the theurgists the entire cosmos is full of the names of the gods. And not just our physical cosmos, but also the worlds above it. It is by means of the διαπὸρθμιον ὄνομα (‘mediating name’) that we communicate with the gods.<sup>38</sup> This mediating name appears again in *In Crat.* LXXI p. 33, 14 where it is connected to the former of the two *Oracles*, at which occasion we shall come back on this elevating function of divine names.

#### 4. *Instruments: form and matter* (In *Crat.* LIII–VIII)

##### 4.1 Introduction

In *Crat.* 389b–390a Socrates takes a closer look at what it means for a name to be an instrument. When a craftsman makes an instrument, e.g. a shuttle, he puts the form (εἶδος) of what it is to be a shuttle into a piece of matter (ύλη), e.g. a piece of wood. Whereas the form will

<sup>35</sup> *In Tim.* I 210, 30–211, 8: καὶ ὁ δημιουργὸς περὶ τὰς ψυχὰς ἐνήργησε τοῦ τε μένειν αὐταῖς καὶ τοῦ ἐπιστρέφειν συνθήματα δούς (...). . . συμβόλοις ἀρρήτοις τῶν θεῶν, ἃ τῶν ψυχῶν ὁ πατὴρ ἐνέσπειρεν αὐταῖς, τῶν θεῶν τὴν εὐποίαν ἔλκουσα εἰς ἐαυτήν.

<sup>36</sup> Brisson 2003: 116; For the comparison to the anamnesis-theory in the *Phaedrus*, cf. Proclus *Chald. phil.* V p. 211, 18–22.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the comments by Festugière 1967: 33 n. 2 who takes issue with Lewy 1978: 190–192, who had claimed that these symbols are exclusively names. I note in passing that this text is not an argument against my interpretation of **T. 5.3**, for in the latter case Proclus was dealing with man-made names, whereas here he discusses names that the gods have revealed to us.

<sup>38</sup> On this name cf. the note *ad loc.* in ed. Segonds 1986: 378 additional note 6 to p. 215.

be the same for all instruments of a certain type, they will all be made of different pieces of matter. Socrates uses this model to explain the diversity of languages. If (correctly established) languages seem to differ from one another, that is because they are made of different bits of matter (different bits of sounds). However, they are the same in regard to their form.

In his commentary on this passage, Proclus elaborates on his thesis that naming is a divine art, closely related to the demiurgy of the cosmos. He starts (*In Crat.* LIII) by discussing the issue of the ‘forms’ of instruments, whether or not such forms actually exist. He then switches to the matter of instruments (*In Crat.* LIV and LV). He relates Socrates’ explanation of the existence of various languages to the issue of the existence of forms of particulars. These two issues appear on a list of standard problems regarding the theory of Forms that were discussed in Platonic schools in Antiquity.<sup>39</sup> Proclus’ own treatment of the list may be found in *In Parm.* III 815, 15–833, 19. The question of the existence of the forms of artifacts is examined in *In Parm.* III 827, 26–829, 21, that of the existence of forms of particulars in *In Parm.* III 824, 12–825, 35. Proclus’ treatment of these questions in the *Commentary on the Parmenides* bears a close resemblance to *In Crat.* LIII and *In Crat.* LV, and hence it will be useful to include them in our discussion of the *Commentary on the Cratylus*.

On the basis of these considerations, Proclus next (*In Crat.* LVII discussed in § 4.4 below) pronounces himself on a serious matter in Neoplatonic theurgy that had already been discussed by Porphyry and Iamblichus, the question whether barbaric divine names are more powerful in rituals than their Greek equivalents.

Following a by now well-known pattern, Proclus ends his discussion of the nature of tools by using the upshot of the discussion as new ammunition against Aristotle’s claim that names are just conventional (*In Crat.* LVIII discussed in § 4.5 below).

#### 4.2 The form of instruments (*In Crat.* LIII)

Socrates’ talk about the εἶδος of a shuttle in the *Cratylus* or about the form of a bed in *Republic* X 597b, might leave one with the impression that there exist transcendental Forms of artifacts.<sup>40</sup> Both Platonic

<sup>39</sup> On this list, see O’Meara 1999: 263–265; cf. also D’Hoine 2004.

<sup>40</sup> The example of the bed is mentioned in *In Crat.* LIII p. 23, 3 ff. and features

and traditional Greek mythology—to Proclus nothing else but Platonic philosophy in another format—strengthen this impression, for in myths we find numerous weaving deities, such as the weaving young gods in Plato’s *Timaeus* and Athena, Circe and other gods in Greek mythology, while the “theologians”, thus Proclus, call the shuttle a “symbol of the discriminating powers of the gods”.<sup>41</sup>

Proclus is at pains to correct this erroneous impression: there are no metaphysical Forms of artifacts.<sup>42</sup> A clear indication for this is that whereas all things that come into existence through nature<sup>43</sup> have a fixed essence, artifacts lack such a stable nature. We constantly adapt them to our needs.<sup>44</sup> This does not mean that the theologians got it all wrong. Proclus is convinced that figures such as Homer and Orpheus were divinely inspired authorities, so they simply have to be right. When they say that these gods weave, it is an ἀναλογία. This notion, mentioned in the discussion of the weaving gods in *In Crat.* LIII, is more fully discussed in *In Crat.* LVI.<sup>45</sup> Analogy is neither the same as the relation of Form to participant (say of the Form Horse to a particular horse), nor is an analogy completely arbitrary as an Aristotelian symbol is.<sup>46</sup> It consists in some sort of comparison between two things. Proclus mentions the case of the *Phaedrus* myth in which Plato refers to the powers of the soul as ‘horses’, neither for no reason, nor because these powers are the ideas of perceptible horses.<sup>47</sup> In the case

---

prominently in Proclus’ discussion of the question of the existence of Forms of artifacts in *In Parm.* III 827, 28 ff.

<sup>41</sup> See *In Crat.* LIII p. 21, 13–22, 15 for the divine craftsmen in Greek mythology and Plato. See *In Crat.* LVI for the shuttle as a symbol for divine activities.

<sup>42</sup> *In Crat.* LIII p. 21, 6–7: “Ὅτι τῶν μὲν ἐνταῦθα τεχνητῶν διωρισμένας αἰτίας καὶ παραδείγματα ἀπολείπειν οὐκ ἀνεκτόν. Cf. *In Parm.* V 985, 40–986, 7 where Proclus observes that “one must not, because of the addition of ‘itself’ immediately assume that one is inquiring into the intelligible Forms in the strict sense. It is through falling into this error that certain theorists have postulated Forms of evil things and of artificial objects (τῶν τεχνητῶν) because of the ‘shuttle itself’ in the *Cratylus* (τὴν αὐτοκερκίδα ἐν Κρατύλῳ) and ‘impiety itself’ in the *Euthyphro*, because all classes of Forms are given the epithet ‘itself’ in order to distinguish them from particulars” (trans. Morrow-Dillon); on this passage see further Steel 2003.

<sup>43</sup> *In Crat.* LIII p. 21, 9f.: διὰ τῆς φύσεως πρόεισι; Proclus clearly has the Aristotelian sense of ‘natural’ (see pp. 106–107) in mind here.

<sup>44</sup> *In Crat.* LIII p. 21, 7–13.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* LIII p. 22, 15–17: “if somebody going through the analogies, would call the powers of the gods the causes of these crafts...he would say so correctly”.

<sup>46</sup> *In Crat.* LVI p. 24, 22: θέσει καὶ συμβολικῶς.

<sup>47</sup> *In Crat.* LVI p. 24, 29–25, 1: οἷον ὡς ὁ Πλάτων ἵππους καλεῖ τὰς τοιάσδε τῶν ψυχῶν δυνάμεις, οὔτε ὡς ἔτυχεν, οὔτε ἰδέας λέγων τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἵππων ἐκείνας, ἀλλὰ τῇ ἀναλογίᾳ χρώμενος.



of the divine weavers and human weavers the point of comparison is that they both unify different things into a single whole in such a manner that the different parts do not fuse with each other. In the case of the human craft of weaving, the threads that are united into one fabric remain clearly distinguishable from each other. In an analogous fashion, the divine weavers, demiurgical deities, unify opposites like, “the generated to the eternal, the mortal to the immortal, bodies to the incorporeal, the perceptible to the intellectual” (*In Crat.* LIII p. 22, 21–23), in such a way that these are still recognizable as opposites. The shuttle, the instrument that creates a unified fabric by dividing warp and woof, is the appropriate symbol of this divine activity. From the fact that a shuttle supposedly has magical powers in ritual contexts, it appears furthermore that analogy is not just a matter of convention.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the gods may be called the patrons (ἑφοροί)<sup>49</sup> and guardians of the arts, even though intelligible Forms of either arts or artifacts do not exist.<sup>50</sup>

In the case of the analogy between the craftsman who makes a shuttle, the name-giver and the Demiurge, the point of comparison is that they all put a single form into different pieces of matter:

**T. 5.12** Therefore, the shuttle is to the carpenter, what names are to the legislator and what all encosmic things are to the Demiurge. Thus, there exist three sorts of forms: intellectual (νοερώς) Forms, scientific (ἐπιστημονικῶς) forms, and forms regarding opinion (δοξαστικῶς). From the intellectual Forms come all perceptible things, from the scientific forms the names, and from the forms based on opinion the shuttles (*In Crat.* LIII p. 23, 21–25).

The Demiurge, the name-giver and the carpenter thus all have forms in their mind on the basis of which they create something, be it that these are different types of forms. In the case of the Demiurge these are the intelligible Forms, in the case of the carpenter it is some kind of blue print of a shuttle, of which there exists no intelligible Form. The

<sup>48</sup> For the ritual powers of these objects on the basis of analogy, see *In Crat.* LVI p. 25, 1–7; on the notion of theurgical sympathy, see pp. 140–142.

<sup>49</sup> The Platonic source text is probably Plato *Phdr.* 265b2–c3; cf. Proclus *In Parm.* III 829, 11 (ἑφοροί λεγόνται τῶν τεχνῶν), where, for that matter, it is daemons not gods who are said to be the patrons of the arts. Proclus identifies this class of ἑφοροί divinities with the guardian daemons that the souls choose as part of their future lives before being born, cf. *In Crat.* LXIII p. 27, 14–15 discussed in § 5.1 below; see further, e.g., Proclus *In RP.* II 271, 6–273, 5 and cf., e.g., Damascius *In Phd.* I 480.

<sup>50</sup> *In Crat.* LIII p. 22, 25–28.

name-giver stands somewhere in between these two. On the one hand, names are man-made artifacts, like shuttles; on the other hand they are, as we have seen, related to intelligible reality. Proclus' discussion of the existence of Forms of artifacts from *In Parm.* III 827, 26–829, 21 throws some interesting light on this text. There, Proclus starts by denying that there are Forms of artifacts and arts, such as the bed from *Republic* X. These are things “that the soul uses when it is at play, or occupied with mortal things, or ministering to the needs of human life” only. The soul has a power to produce theorems about these, which resides in its opinative faculty.<sup>51</sup> We have to distinguish these arts (τέχναι) from other arts or sciences (ἐπιστήμαι), such as arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, that “elevate the soul and make it like Intellect” and of which “we shall posit Forms to which they make us like”.<sup>52</sup> These sciences owe their elevating character to their objects, e.g. figures and numbers. The latter are the likenesses of intellectual Forms. The study of these sciences thus redirects our attention from the material world to the intelligible world of Forms, the object of contemplation of the divine Intellect. In this way these sciences “join us with Intellect”.<sup>53</sup> As we have already seen, the art of naming should be counted among the sciences that elevate us to Intellect. For, like these other sciences, it forces us to look upward to the Forms in order to make verbal likeness of them.

#### 4.3 The matter of instruments (*In Crat.* LIV–LV)

Now that we have discussed the εἶδος of a name, it is time to turn to the ὕλη of names which, says Proclus, is provided by nature (*In Crat.* LIV). As we have seen, Plato explained the existence of different languages from the differences in matter in which one and the same form had been incorporated. Proclus *In Crat.* LV elaborates on this issue which, for him, is tied up with the question of how the one Form Man can be the cause of the multitude of different individual men. As so often in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, this passage is very condensed and it helps considerably to take other passages into account, notably a passage

<sup>51</sup> *In Parm.* III 829, 2–7 (trans. Morrow-Dillon): ὅσαι δὲ ψυχῆς εἰσι παιζούσης καὶ περὶ τὰ θνητὰ διατριβούσης καὶ τὰς ἀνθρωπίνας χρείας θεραπευούσης, τούτων οὐδεμίας εἶδος ἐστὶ νοερόν· ἀλλ’ ἡ μὲν ψυχὴ τὴν δύναμιν ἔχει τὴν τῶν θεωρημάτων οἰστικὴν ἐν τῇ δόξῃ κειμένην.

<sup>52</sup> *In Parm.* III 828, 22–24: ὅσαι μὲν ἀνάγουσι τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ὁμοιοῦσι πρὸς νοῦν.

<sup>53</sup> *In Parm.* III 828, 30–31: Αὐταὶ γὰρ δὴ καὶ ἡμᾶς συνάπτουσι πρὸς νοῦν.

from the *Commentary on the Timaeus* on demiurgy and one from the *Commentary on the Parmenides* on the issue of forms of individuals.

Proclus starts *In Crat.* LV by discussing the creation of the individuals. The δημιουργία of the universe is two-fold. The Demiurge is responsible for the first, universal (ὅλικῶς), creation, which results from his contemplation of the intelligible Forms that are the formal causes of the universe and that do not admit of any change.<sup>54</sup> The second stage of creation, the so-called particular (μερικῶς) one, consists in the creation of the particulars on the basis of the universal Forms to which the particular differentiae are added.<sup>55</sup> Proclus explains this by means of the example of a man. The Form Man that is the formal cause of all encosmic men, is itself unchanging, forever the same. However, mortal men differ in “size, the color of their skin and the like”.<sup>56</sup> Responsible for this second creation are the so-called young gods (νέοι θεοί).<sup>57</sup> According to the *Timaeus*, the Demiurge creates these gods, to whom both the heavenly bodies and the traditional Greek gods who manifest themselves through epiphanies belong. He addresses them in a speech in which he delegates to them the task of making the inferior living creatures (*Ti.* 41 a–d). These lesser creatures, he explains, have to be brought into being in order that the universe is perfect and complete.<sup>58</sup> The Demiurge cannot do this himself, because this would result in another set of gods, not in mortal beings. He therefore orders the young gods to “imitate my power in generating you” (*Ti.* 41 c 5f.: μιμούμενοι τὴν ἐμὴν δύναμιν περὶ τὴν ὑμετέραν γένεσιν). He himself will make the immortal aspect of the mortal beings, but they have to “weave immortal to mortal” (*Ti.* 41 d 1–2: ἀθανάτω θνητὸν προσυφαίνοντες).<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 1–3: “Ὅτι διττὴ ἡ τοῦ παντὸς δημιουργία· ἡ μὲν γὰρ τοὺς ἐπὶ πάντα διατείνοντας ὑφιστάσα λόγους καὶ τὰ εἶδη τὰ ὁσάυτως ἔχοντα καὶ μηδεμίαν ὑπομένοντα μεταβολήν.

<sup>55</sup> *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 3–4: ἡ δὲ τὰς μεριστὰς προστιθεῖσα τοῖς γινομένοις διαφορότητας.

<sup>56</sup> *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 8: μεγέθεσι καὶ χροιαῖς καὶ τοῖς τοιουτοῖς.

<sup>57</sup> For the name, see Plato *Ti.* 42 d 6; cf., e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* LIII p. 22, 5 (τοῖς νέοις δημιουργοῖς), *In Crat.* LV p. 22, 9–10 (τῆς τῶν νέων θεῶν δευτέρας δημιουργίας). On Proclus’ interpretation of the young gods, see the helpful discussion by Opsomer 2003.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 14–16: the young gods fabricate all these different individuals in order to achieve “the fulfillment of the universe” (τὴν τοῦ παντὸς συμπλήρωσιν).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* LIII p. 22, 4–6) and *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 8–11 for allusions to this phrase.

Plato may have introduced the young gods just in order to keep the Demiurge separated from matter and to give the traditional Greek gods a place in his cosmos. For Proclus, though, the Platonic passage about these gods and their activity of weaving mortal and immortal together held the key to the solution of a thorny problem, that of the causation of individuals, which he discusses at length in *In Parm.* III 824, 12–825, 35. Should we, Proclus wonders there, postulate apart from the Form Man also Forms of individuals, like a Form of the individual Socrates? If we do so, we have to assume that, since Forms are stable and unchanging, their products too are stable and unchanging, and hence that the individual Socrates is the same for all eternity, i.e. immortal, whereas in fact he was, of course, not. We should thus rule out the existence of Forms of individuals. Yet, everything that comes into being has been caused in one way or another, so we have need to posit some sort of cause of individuals, if not Forms:

**T. 5.13** If you want a single cause, it could be the order of the universe; or if several, you could name the motion of the heavens, the particular natures, the properties of the seasons, or the various regions (τὰ κλίματα), or the gods that superintend these causes (τοὺς τούτων ἐφόρους), for all of these are involved in the making of individuals (τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστα) (*In Parm.* III 825, 13–18; trans. Morrow-Dillon).

It is here that the young gods from the *Timaeus* come in, even though this passage does not mention them explicitly. As we have seen, the young gods are associated with the (moving) heavenly bodies, “the motions of the heavens”. Proclus *In Crat.* LV p. 24, 6 indeed ascribes the ‘second demiurgy’ to the stars, explaining that that these by their movements generate the individual differences: since they move into different positions they will produce different things (p. 24, 13–16). But the discussion from *In Parm.* III has even more to offer, for Proclus explains that the gods that superintend these causes do so due to their own special properties:

**T. 5.14** [they] differ from one another in the shapes, colors, speech and motion particular to them (*In Parm.* III 825, 21–23; Morrow-Dillon).<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> ἄλλα γὰρ ἄλλοις καὶ σχήματα οἰκεῖα καὶ χρώματα καὶ φωναὶ καὶ κινήσεις. Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* I 99, 13–26 and esp. 18–22 for a comparable list of qualities including speech that differ because of different local gods (πολὺ δ’ ἂν μάλιστα διαφέρειν εἴποις αὐτὰ κατὰ τὴν ἀγγελαιοκομικὴν τῶν θεῶν ἐπιστάσιαν καὶ τὰς τῶν ἐφόρων διαφορότητας, παρ’ ἃς καὶ χρώματα καὶ σχήματα καὶ φωνὰς καὶ κινήσεις ἐξαλλαττομένας εὖροις ἂν ἐν τοῖς διαφοροῖς τόποις).

So, apparently, the same god who causes Ethiopians to be black also makes them speak Ethiopian. Previously, we have seen that the name-giver is like the Demiurge, in that he produces images as the products of his contemplation of the Forms. A more detailed examination of the process of demiurgy reveals that the human name-giver rather resembles the young gods, weaving the form into acoustic matter. And since one name-giver will be Greek, with typical Greek features, he will produce Greek names, whereas another being Scythian, will produce Scythian names.

#### 4.4 Barbarian versus Greek divine names (*In Crat.* LVII)

Proclus *In Crat.* LVII uses his explanation of the variety of languages to decide on the heavily disputed question among Neoplatonists whether the Greeks should invoke the gods by their barbarian names instead of their Greek ones. As we have already mentioned (chapter three § 4.2), Iamblichus had defended the claim that Greek divine names were less appropriate and therefore less powerful than their barbaric equivalents. Proclus agrees with Iamblichus that for prayers to be effective, we have to use names that are agreeable to the gods. Yet, in the case of local gods, what is most pleasing to them is their own local language. The excerptor reports that

**T. 5.15** Therefore Proclus says that the Greeks need not use the Egyptian names of the gods, neither the Scythian or Persian ones, but they need to use the Greek ones. For the rulers of the various regions (οἱ κλιματάρχαι) like to be named in accordance with the dialects of their own regions (ταῖς τῶν οἰκείων χωρῶν διαλέκτοις) (*In Crat.* LVII p. 25, 13–16).

The “rulers of the various regions” (οἱ κλιματάρχαι) are, of course, the gods associated with specific regions (τὰ κλίματα) mentioned in **T. 5.13** above. This remark should be understood against the background of Proclus’ theory of theurgy. In order to attract the benevolence of the gods, one has to invoke them by means of so-called σύμβολα or συνθήματα.<sup>61</sup> These are things of which the god invoked is directly or indirectly the cause. As we have seen, the “rulers of the various regions” are the causes of the various languages spoken in those regions, and so we may expect that when, say, praying to Athena in Athens, the region

<sup>61</sup> On which see pp. 140–142 above.

of which she is the ruler, she will like it best when she is invoked by her Attic name.<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.5 Another refutation of Aristotle (*In Crat.* LVIII)

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, Proclus now launches a new argument against Aristotle's claim that names are by imposition, not by nature. On the basis of Aristotle's λόγος—i.e. *Int.* 16a3–9: names are conventional symbols in sound (ἐν τῇ φωνῇ) that are not the same for all, see **T. 1.11**—Proclus constructs the following syllogism.

- T. 5.16** Things that are by nature are the same in all cases  
 Names are not the same in all cases.  
 Therefore natural things are not names and names are not  
 by nature (*In Crat.* LVIII p. 25, 17–20).

As we have seen, one of the reasons to reformulate a text into syllogism is to test the argument.<sup>63</sup> Proclus hastens to criticize every step of the argument. He first attacks the premiss that names are not the same in all cases, i.e. that in different languages one and the same thing is called by different names. If, as Plato says, a name consists of a form that may be expressed in various sorts of acoustic matter, then because of this identical form, it is still the same name in all cases. However, one might also argue that natural things need not be the same in all cases.<sup>64</sup> Natural things may, for instance, differ in intensity. Eyes are clearly natural, yet some have better eyes than others.<sup>65</sup> In either case, Aristotle fails to demonstrate that names are not by nature. But even if one were to accept the two premises, still the conclusion “is no more Aristotelian than Platonic”.<sup>66</sup> For, later in his discussion with Cratylus

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the discussion in *In Tim.* I 98, 31–99, 7 where Proclus raises the question why the Athenians and the inhabitants of Saïs, two cities that both belong to the goddess Athena, invoke her by different names, i.e. a Greek and an Egyptian name. His solution is clearly inspired by the discussion in the *Cratylus*. Proclus explains that it is perfectly well possible to signify the same things by different sounds (διὰ πλεονόνων φωνῶν; the different sounds are due to the difference in location, see *In Tim.* I 99, 18–22), just as one can have statues of one and the same deity that have been made of different materials.

<sup>63</sup> For the practice of reformulating Aristotelian texts into syllogisms, see pp. 118–121 above.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* LVIII p. 25, 21–23.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* LVIII p. 25, 24–27.

<sup>66</sup> *In Crat.* LVIII p. 25, 26–27, 3.

Socrates will show that names are not products of nature (cf. *Crat.* 435a–d), while it escapes Aristotle that Plato distinguishes two sense of natural.<sup>67</sup> Many Neoplatonists, including for instance Proclus' own pupil Ammonius, will use this line of argument to bring out the essential harmony between Plato and Aristotle.<sup>68</sup> Proclus, however, uses it to expose Aristotle as a quarrelsome thinker who wants to criticize Plato so desperately that he does not see that what he claims does not necessarily contradict Plato's position.

## 5. *The dialectician: the user of names* (In *Crat.* LIX–LXVII)

### 5.1 Cronus the divine dialectician (In *Crat.* LXIII)

Having discussed the double nature of a name and its craftsman, Socrates (*Crat.* 390b–d) next turns to the supervisor of the name-giver, the dialectician. The *Cratylus* thus distinguishes between two different groups of people who use the products of the name-giver. On the one hand, there is the dialectician who is clearly superior to the name-giver, on the other hand, there is the rest of the population that receives the names as a sort of laws to which it should obey.

Just as Proclus had previously identified the divine name-giver with the Demiurge, he will now identify the divine dialectician, already mentioned in the prolegomena, with the divine supervisor of the Demiurge. He does so in *In Crat.* LXIII where he discusses the mediate position of the name-giver. The discussion starts with an *aporia*: it may seem strange (ἄτοπον φαίνεται) that both the dialectician who is superior to the legislator and the judge who is inferior to the legislator use his work, the laws. Proclus explains that whereas the former uses these laws as an instrument (ὁ μὲν ὡς ὀργάνῳ χρῆται), the latter uses it as a first principle and as a given (ὁ δὲ ὡς ἀρχῇ καὶ θέσει).<sup>69</sup> Proclus compares this to the mediate position of the human soul who has its superior guardian daemon as a leader and patron, whereas it uses its body as an instrument.<sup>70</sup> More importantly still, this pattern repeats itself

<sup>67</sup> See pp. 106–109.

<sup>68</sup> See pp. 201–205.

<sup>69</sup> *In Crat.* LXIII p. 27, 13–14.

<sup>70</sup> For the body as the instrument of the human soul, cf. Plato *Alc.* I 129e and Proclus *In Alc.* 73, 8–75, 13.

at the level of the divine legislator, the paradigm of human legislators. Zeus, the Demiurge, is the first legislator. As we have seen (§ 3.2) and as we are reminded in *In Crat.* LXIII p. 27, 15–17, he produces the ‘laws of Fate’ or Dike, his daughter. She maintains the laws that have been ordained by Zeus in the cosmos. Zeus himself legislates under the supervision of his father Cronus.

At this point Proclus elaborates on his metaphysical interpretation of the gods Cronus and Zeus. This discussion points forward to the detailed interpretation of Hesiod’s theogony with which Proclus ends his *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Proclus identifies Cronus with the first member of the intellectual triad (*Nous*), who contemplates the intelligible world. In doing so, he divides up the intelligible, while at the same unifying the plurality thus created. He is, thus Proclus, the highest cause of combinations and discriminations of the intelligible (τῶν συναγωγῶν καὶ τῶν διαιρέσεων τὰς ἀκροτάτας αἰτίας),<sup>71</sup> i.e. he thinks the intelligible world as a unified whole of separated Forms.<sup>72</sup> The human dialectician imitates him when he divides reality at its joints while weaving a fabric of discourse by means of names.<sup>73</sup> Zeus, the Demiurge, is another member of the triad of Cronus. Yet, he does not contemplate the intelligible Forms directly, as does Cronus, but indirectly, as the thoughts of Cronus.<sup>74</sup> Hence within the intellectual triad, Zeus is the intellectual (contemplating) deity and Cronus the intelligible (contemplated) deity.<sup>75</sup> Whereas Cronus is happy just to contemplate the intelligible, Zeus, the Demiurge, not just contemplates the intelligible above, but also creates a material image of it, i.e. this material cosmos. Proclus makes much of this when he discusses Plato’s explanation of the name “Cronus” (Κρόνος) as a pure (κóρος) intellect (νοῦς). Cronus is a pure intellect, because he remains aloof from the material world, completely engaged in the contemplation of the intelligible, whereas the Zeus the Demiurge organizes the perceptible world and exercises

<sup>71</sup> *In Crat.* LXIII p. 27, 26–27.

<sup>72</sup> *In Crat.* LXXIII p. 27, 26–28, 4.

<sup>73</sup> See *In Crat.* L for the separating power of names; cf. *In Crat.* LVI esp. p. 24, 17–18 (ἡ κερκὶς εἰκὼν ἐστὶν τῆς διακριτικῆς τῶν ὅλων); *In Crat.* LI p. 20, 18–21 for the fact that names not just separate but also allow us to share our thoughts, thus weaving some kind of communion (κοινωνία) between souls.

<sup>74</sup> *In Crat.* LXIII p. 28, 4–6.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of this passages, see Brisson 2002a: 445–448. Proclus offers a fuller treatment of the relation of Cronus to Zeus in *Theol. Plat.* V 5 esp. pp. 23, 19–24, 21 in which Proclus discusses the role of Cronus in the *Cratylus*.



providence towards his inferiors, as appears from the fact that draws up the laws of Destiny.<sup>76</sup>

Proclus connects this interpretation of Cronus as a pure Intellect and Zeus as a demiurgical Intellect to his interpretation of the myth from the *Statesman*.<sup>77</sup> This myth takes up a theme from Greek mythology, that of a Golden Age under the rule of Cronus when living was easy. Cronus had organized the universe in such a way that all the necessary conditions of life, such as sheltering, clothing and food had been taken care of. According to Proclus, these “nurslings of Cronus” (οἱ τρόφιμοι τοῦ Κρόνου, *Plt.* 272b8) used their abundant spare time to do philosophy, together with the equally intelligent animals, seeking to enlarge the common pool of wisdom (Proclus *In Crat.* LXIII p. 28, 10–14 = Plato *Plt.* 272bc2–4).<sup>78</sup> Plato contrasts this happy period to the rough period that the world is currently going through. This is the age of Zeus. According to the myth, these are alternating periods, so we may expect a next Golden Age in the future. Yet, according to Proclus’ interpretation of the myth, these periods stand for two different aspects of the cosmos. The age of Cronus is the so-called “invisible life of the cosmos”, i.e. the presence of intellect in it, whereas the age of Zeus is the “visible life of the cosmos”, which consists in the organization of the material cosmos.<sup>79</sup> According to Proclus, Zeus, the Demiurge, is responsible for both. On the one hand, together with Cronus, he introduces intellect in the cosmos, the cosmic intellect. As part of this activity, Zeus leads the human souls to the realm of Cronus, thus allowing them to contemplate the intelligible with him, i.e. living a blissful existence, filled with dialectical activity.<sup>80</sup> He does so by means of his creation, the material cosmos. This cosmos is an image of the intelligible cosmos, i.e. the thoughts of Cronus. It may prompt human souls to look for its paradigm. In this manner, Cronus uses (χρηται) the products of Zeus as an “upward leading path”.<sup>81</sup> As we shall see in the next paragraph,

<sup>76</sup> Plato *Crat.* 396b; for this interpretation, see Proclus *In Crat.* CVII esp. p. 57, 2–13.

<sup>77</sup> For the myth, see Plato *Plt.* 268d–274e; for Proclus’ interpretation, see especially *Theol. Plat.* V 7–8 pp. 26, 21–30, 6 and the helpful discussion by Dillon 1995 of the Neoplatonic exegesis of the myth, focussing especially on the interpretation by Proclus.

<sup>78</sup> According to Plato himself, they might have done philosophy, yet he does not exclude the possibility that in fact they wasted their time doing more mundane things, cf. pp. 15–16.

<sup>79</sup> See *Theol. Plat.* V 6 p. 25, 3 ff. discussed by Dillon 1995: 371–2.

<sup>80</sup> *In Crat.* LXIII p. 28, 8–10.

<sup>81</sup> *In Crat.* LXIII p. 28, 18–21.

names spoken by the philosopher function in an analogous manner. They are images of the thoughts of the philosopher that may lead the student to study the metaphysical reality to which these names refer. At the same time Zeus runs the material universe through the laws of Fate. The Demiurge as the first legislator thus sets the paradigm of human legislation. This legislation is necessary to keep those living Zeusian lives in check (those living Cronian, philosophical lives have, of course, need not be told what to do and what not to).

## 5.2 Socrates the human dialectician (*In Crat.* LXIV–LXVII)

Proclus ends his discussion of the dialectician as the one who uses names by bringing the discussion back from the level of Cronus and Zeus to that of human beings. According to Proclus, the role of Socrates in the *Cratylus* is analogous to Intellect (*In Crat.* LXVII), for Socrates is a dialectician, “as he says of himself”.<sup>82</sup> As a dialectician he uses the names, images of the things fashioned by a name-giver, just as Cronus uses the images created by Zeus to lead the souls upwards. Proclus stresses the point that the human dialectician is only an intellect in a secondary sense. Whereas true Intellect has the total sum of knowledge of beings in itself in actuality, the philosopher only has an illumination of Intellect (ἐλλαψις νοῦ), a faint image of Intellect (εἰδωλον νοῦ) as it were.<sup>83</sup> All the same, the philosopher knows the methods of discovery and instructs these to his pupil, thus resembling Hermes, the patron deity of philosophical discourse.<sup>84</sup> Just as the philosopher himself is only a faint image of intellect, so the student is not led towards the contemplation of the intelligible Forms themselves, but to that of his innate Forms. This appears, for instance, from a question that Proclus had previously raised (*In Crat.* LXI) in connection to this passage from the *Cratylus*: why does Socrates call himself a dialectician, but not a teacher? Proclus answers that Socrates was not a teacher in the sense that he installed knowledge in the soul of his pupil that previously had not been there, as happens in the case of teaching one how to dance

<sup>82</sup> *In Crat.* LXI p. 26, 21–22.

<sup>83</sup> *In Crat.* LXIV p. 28, 22–26.

<sup>84</sup> *In Crat.* LXVI p. 28, 29–30. For the Neoplatonists, Hermes is not primarily the deceptive word painter of *Crat.* 407e–408a, but the god of the philosophical *logos*, cf. *In Crat.* CXVII p. 68, 12, where for that reason he is called “our lord Hermes”, i.e. of the patron deity of philosophers. For Hermes as a patron deity of philosophical discourse, cf., e.g., Proclus *Theol. Plat.* VI 22 p. 98, 14–17.

or how to write. Yet in another sense he was a teacher. For in the case of philosophy, learning consists in recollection, in calling forward the innate knowledge in the soul of the student. “For”, Proclus, explains, “the soul is not like a blank writing tablet, nor does it possess the things only potentially, but it possesses them actually, even though they have been covered over.”<sup>85</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, one of the functions of etymology is, according to Proclus, precisely the activation of our innate notions about the gods.<sup>86</sup>

## 6. *Conclusions*

Proclus believes that the aim of the *Cratylus* is to reveal “the generative activity and assimilative power” of the soul (**T. 4.1**). Producing likenesses, it appears from this chapter, consist in embodying a certain form that we have in our mind into a piece of matter. This holds true, for example, for paintings or statues of persons or gods, but also for correctly given names. In the latter case we put our knowledge about a thing into a bit of sound. This knowledge we derive from doing dialectic. Dialectic consists in activating and articulating our innate Ideas. The activity of the human name-giver is thus analogous to that of the divine Intellect that produces the material cosmos as an image of the intelligible cosmos. The pure Intellect (Cronus), analogous to the human dialectician, contemplates the intelligible Forms or Ideas. This contemplation informs the creative activity of the demiurgical Intellect (Zeus and his assistants, the young gods). Cronus uses the creation of Zeus, the beautiful material world to lead human souls back to its paradigm, his intellections of the intelligible world. In the same manner Socrates in the *Cratylus* uses the products of the name-giver, the correctly established names, to lead his student Hermogenes towards the paradigm of these names, the innate Ideas that both he and Hermogens possess.

---

<sup>85</sup> *In Crat.* LXI p. 26, 26–27. For the soul as a writing tablet upon which is constantly being written, see Proclus *In Euclid.* 16, 8–10 and the discussion by Steel 1997a, see especially p. 299 for the comparison of the soul to a writing tablet. The expression ‘covered over’ (κατακεχωσμένα) has been taken from *Crat.* 414c5: “the first names given to things have long been covered over by those who dress them up” by adding and subtracting letters.

<sup>86</sup> See pp. 181–182 below.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PROCLUS' *COMMENTARY ON THE CRATYLUS* (III): LEARNING FROM DIVINE NAMES

#### 1. *Introduction*

In the previous chapter we have seen that Proclus assumes that the *Cratylus* instructs its reader not just about the basic elements of dialectic, i.e. correctly established names, but also about the basic elements of reality by means of etymology. In this chapter, we shall turn to Proclus' treatment of the etymological section of the *Cratylus*. As we have seen in chapter four, Proclus distinguishes between two types of names: those of mortal individuals and those of eternal beings. Only names of the latter type are a source of knowledge, since knowledge is about eternal things only. As we have also seen, Proclus considers divine names as the prototypes of these names and he tends to narrow the discussion of this type of names down to these. In the etymological section his interest is almost exclusively in divine names.<sup>1</sup> To Proclus these etymologies were clearly a very important aspect of the *Cratylus* and he spends half his commentary discussing *Crat.* 396a–407b, after which the commentary breaks off.<sup>2</sup> In a way, this is only what one would expect, given the fact that Proclus tends to consider Platonic metaphysics, the study of these eternal entities, as a sort of theology. Therefore, this chapter will focus on Proclus' ideas about divine names. In keeping with Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, we shall first discuss the nature of divine names. It will turn out that Proclus distinguishes between different types of divine names. Next, we shall move to the etymologies of these divine names and examine what role they play in Proclus' philosophy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Admittedly, Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* has not been preserved intact. Therefore, we cannot exclude the possibility that Proclus discussed the entire etymological section. It is, however, significant that in his other works he refers almost exclusively to the etymologies of divine names.

<sup>2</sup> To give a rough impression of the attention paid to this part of the dialogue: whereas it took Proclus some 46 pages in Pasquali's edition to discuss about the 13 Stephanus pages (i.e. some 3,5 pages pro Stephanus page), he needs another 66 pages to deal with the next 11 Stephanus pages (i.e. 6 pages pro Stephanus page).

2. *The nature of divine names* (In *Crat.* LXXI)

At the end of his discussion with Socrates, Hermogenes' position that the correctness of names depends on convention alone may have been refuted, yet he remains unconvinced of the opposite thesis, i.e. that there exists a natural correctness of names. So he asks Socrates to really convince him of this. Socrates tries to do so by an appeal to the authority of Homer. Doesn't Homer distinguish between the names by which humans call things and those by which the gods call them? Examples are the names of the river Σκάμανδρος, called Ξάνθος by the gods, the bird κύμινδις the divine name of which is χαλκίς, and the hill Βατίετα which is known as Μυρίνη to the gods. Surely, we have to assume that the gods call things by their naturally correct names (*Crat.* 391c–d).<sup>3</sup> The modern reader might be tempted not to take this passage very seriously. Socrates' remark that it is “no trifling matter” (*Crat.* 392a6 φαῦλον τὸ μάθημα) to know to what extent the divine name χαλκίς for a small bird is better than its human equivalent κύμινδις, seems a clear instance of Socrates' infamous irony.<sup>4</sup> However, in stark contrast to Plato's criticism on Homer in the *Republic*, the Athenian Neoplatonists considered Homer to be an inspired sage, and took his poems for divine revelations, which in turn might inspire others.<sup>5</sup> It is for this reason that Proclus considers, as we have seen, this passage as the final argument for the natural correctness of names, the one that brings about perfect persuasion.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For a similar distinction between human and divine language, cf. Plato *Phdr.* 252b, where the Homeridae are mentioned as the authorities on divine language. Poets may mention these divine names in order to impress their audience with their privileged knowledge, or to explain the existence of two names for one and the same thing. For these and other explanations, see further Janko 1992: 197. For a discussion of Plato's and Proclus' views on divine language, see also Pinchard 2003.

<sup>4</sup> *Crat.* 391 e–392 b.

<sup>5</sup> Proclus shows himself aware that his attitude towards Homer sits ill with Plato. In *Crat.* LXX addresses this issue. Why does Plato ban Homer from his ideal state in the *Republic*, whereas here he welcomes him as an authority on names? Because in the *Republic* Plato is concerned with the education of the young, here, on the other hand, he is talking to those who are able to receive the inspiration from the poet. Proclus deals with the same *aporia* at length in his sixth essay on the *Republic* in which he offers the same solution. In corroboration of his point, he lists this passage from the *Cratylus* as evidence of Plato's positive attitude towards Homer (*In RP.* II 169, 25–170, 26). On this issue, see further pp. 168–169 below.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. p. 114.

Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI uses this passage as an opportunity to reflect on the nature of divine names,<sup>7</sup> in particular those used by the gods themselves. His point of departure is the following *aporia*: “do there exist secret names at the level of the gods themselves?”<sup>8</sup> The ancients seem to disagree with each other: some hold that the gods themselves transcend this type of designation (p. 29, 25f.: ἐπέκεινα τῆς τοιαύτης σημασίας), others maintain that there are names even among the gods of the highest rank (p. 29, 27f.: τοῖς ὑπερτάτην τάξιν λαχοῦσαν).

Proclus starts his examination of the question from the triadic structure of the divine.<sup>9</sup> The gods have (1.) a uniform and ineffable existence (p. 29, 28f.: τῶν τοίνυν θεῶν καὶ ὑπαρξιν ἐχόντων ἐνοειδῇ καὶ ἄρρητον), (2.) a power which generates all things (καὶ δύναμιν γεννητικὴν τῶν ὅλων) and (3.) an intellect, which is full of thoughts (καὶ νοῦν τέλειον καὶ πλήρη τῶν νοημάτων). The reader acquainted with Proclus’ philosophy will immediately recognize in this triad the circular process of Proclean emanation. The gods at the level of the One, the Henads—the One to the extent that it is participable—remain unchanged at their own level. From them proceeds their creative power, i.e. the intelligible or *noetic* gods, while their products, the intellectual or *noeric* gods revert back on them, i.e. they contemplate the intelligible gods, compelled by a desire to perfect themselves. Proclus argues that the Henads are ineffable and hence have no names. The gods at the level of Intellect, by contrast, can be named, whereas the intermediate level of power constitutes the stage at which the gods can and cannot be named. The crux of the issue is that, as we have seen, names are an expression of knowledge that is based on dialectic. In Platonic dialectic one divides reality by determining the unique property of each class of things that sets it apart from all other classes of things. Yet, at the level of the One and the Henads there can be no analysis of this sort. Because of their absolute one-ness, the Henads cannot have unique properties, for this would involve a degree of plurality. In that case the Henad would be something with a property. Proclus quotes *Parm.* 142a3f. in support of his claim that the divine on the level of the One cannot be named. According to this text, there can be neither a name

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* LXXI p. 29, 21–22: “However, since the present discussion is about divine names, a brief treatment of these is called for.”

<sup>8</sup> *In Crat.* LXXI p. 29, 22–24: καὶ πρῶτον περὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς αὐτοῖς κρυφίως ἰδρυμένων ὀνομάτων εἰπόμεν.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Figure 1* for a graphical representation of this complicated text.

of the One nor a description, nor knowledge, nor sense-perception nor opinion.<sup>10</sup> For, if one were able to say, know, perceive, or opine something about the One, it would no longer be completely one. In Proclus' own words:

**T. 6.1** This (viz. that there is no name of the One) we can understand when we take into consideration that we have to explain everything that is a name of something by nature and fits the object named either by analysis into simple names or by reduction to its letters. If this is so, then 'One' has to be reduced to its letters, since it cannot be analyzed into any simpler names. So the letters of which it is composed will have to represent something of its nature. But each of them will represent something different, and so the first principle will not be one. So if it had a name, the One would not be one. This is proved from the rules about names which are plainly stated in the *Cratylus* (*In Parm.* VII 508, 89–509, 97 ed. Steel; trans. Morrow-Dillon 1987: 591 adapted).<sup>11</sup>

According to Proclus, the name 'One' that we use does not refer to the unnamable One itself, but to our concept of it, which consist in a natural desire for oneness. Our names for other things, by contrast, are based on our knowledge of them.<sup>12</sup> Since there is nothing that can be said about it, the realm of the One is that of silence.<sup>13</sup>

Proclus believes that emanation is a gradual process. He thus assumes that there must be an intermediate stage in between the completely ineffable One and the level at which things can be known and hence be named:

**T. 6.2** About the first genera of the intelligible gods, which are united with the One itself and which are being called 'occult' (κρύφια καλούμενα), there is a lot that is unknowable and ineffable. For what is in every respect clear and effable (τὸ πάντῃ φανὸν καὶ ῥητόν) does not touch on the completely ineffable, but the emanation of the intelligible gods needed to end in this order. It is there that we find the first thing that can be said

<sup>10</sup> Plato *Parm.* 142a3f.: Οὐδ' ἄρα ὄνομα ἔστιν αὐτῷ οὐδὲ λόγος οὐδέ τις ἐπιστήμη οὐδὲ αἴσθησις οὐδὲ δόξα.; Proclus comments on this passage in *In Parm.* VII K-L 50, 49–56, 62 (partly discussed here); cf., for example, *Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 123, 21–124, 2 and *In Crat.* LXXI p. 32, 18–21.

<sup>11</sup> Sadly enough, this part of the commentary on the *Parmenides* has only been preserved in the obscure Latin translation by William of Moerbeke. A Greek retroversion of this translation by Steel & Rumbach 1997 and an annotated French translation by Steel 2004 have done much to clarify this important text.

<sup>12</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* VII 510, 50–62.

<sup>13</sup> *In Crat.* LXXI p. 32, 28: τὰ δὲ πρὸ αὐτῆς σιγώμενα πάντα; the expression σιγή has been borrowed from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, cf. Fr. 116 = *In Crat.* CX p. 63, 25–6; Fr. 132 = *In Crat.* CXV p. 67, 19–20.

and be called by its own names (ὀνόμασιν ἰδίῳις καλούμενον). For it is there that the intellectual nature of the intelligible gods is for the first time illuminated in accordance with the prime Forms (Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI p. 32, 23–25).

As we have stressed before, the essential point in the whole discussion is that names are supposed to be the products of knowledge and that this implies that only objects that have an identity of their own that can be known can be named. On the level of the intelligible gods a gradual process of the differentiation gives rise to these objects of knowledge. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* III 14 p. 51, 20–26, a discussion of the intelligible triad, offers a good description of this process. The first member of the triad is Being itself (πρώτος ὄν αὐτοὸν καὶ ὅπερ ὄν), and since a Form is *a* being and not simply being (τὸ εἶδος τὶ ὄν, ἀλλ' οὐχ ἀπλῶς ὄν), there is no room for the existence of separate Forms there. The middle member of the triad is the productive power that generates the plurality of Forms, yet is not that plurality of Forms. The third member of the triad finally is that plurality of Beings, “for it is there that Being is divided”. This is “the intellectual nature of the intelligible gods” mentioned in **T. 6.2**. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* III 22 p. 80, 25 continues to describe the intellectual member of the intelligible triad as an intelligible light (τὸ φῶς τὸ νοητόν), a light that “shines on all things and which strikes those able to contemplate it with awe.”<sup>14</sup> The *Commentary on the Cratylus* likewise associates these gods with light and illumination (cf. **T. 6.2**). Previously (*In Crat.* LXXI pp. 31, 8–28), Proclus had already given a description of the divine light that shines forth from the level in between the effable and the ineffable: it is unified and shapeless when it is with the gods, but when it shines out it acquires various shapes, i.e. those of the Forms. In support of this, Proclus quotes *Chaldaean Oracle* Fr. 145: “contemplate the shape of light which has been stressed forth.”<sup>15</sup> Proclus informs us that theurgy imitates this process by means of sound that is uttered, yet not articulated.<sup>16</sup>

Proclus collaborates his theory about the first names by an appeal to theurgy and the Orphic poems. Theurgical invocations, we are told (p. 32, 28–30), work up to the intellectual limit of the intelligible

<sup>14</sup> Proclus *Theol. Plat.* III 22 p. 80, 14–15.

<sup>15</sup> *In Crat.* LXXI p. 31, 12–13: διὸ καὶ παρακελεύονται οἱ θεοὶ νοεῖν μορφήν φωτὸς προταθεῖσαν.

<sup>16</sup> *In Crat.* LXXI p. 31, 27–28: ἃ καὶ ἡ θεουργία μιμουμένη δι' ἐκφωνήσεων μὲν, ἀδιαρθρώτων δέ, αὐτὰ προφέρεται.



realm, since above it “everything is silent and hidden” (σιγώμενα πάντα καὶ κρύφια). Furthermore, Orpheus too holds that some levels of the divine are beyond naming (p. 33, 1–9). As the name of the Orphic god Phanes (Φάνης) indicates, he is the light (φῶς) that shines forth from the ineffable noetic divine world, revealing (ἀπέφηνεν) it to the intellectual gods. According to Proclus, this Orphic god corresponds to the last member of the intelligible triad.<sup>17</sup> Hence, he is the first god who can and indeed is named by the gods. Proclus quotes the following Orphic verses in support of his interpretation of the Orphic material:

**T. 6.3** *Metis bears the famous seed of the gods, / which the blessed gods on the high Olympus called Phanes the first born* (Frg. 85 Kern = Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI p. 33, 5–6).

In his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, Proclus returns to these verses in order to prove that ‘Phanes’ is the first divine name.<sup>18</sup> He adds the interesting observation that, since Phanes is the first real name, the names that the Orphic tradition has given to entities above Phanes, such as the ‘Time’, ‘Ether’, ‘Chaos’, and the ‘Egg’ are not the proper names of these gods, but have been assigned to them on the basis of analogy. The reason for this is that these gods cannot be known.<sup>19</sup> In the same way, at the other end of the scale, pure matter too, which lacks a determinate nature because it is too far removed from the One, lacks a proper name (‘matter’ not being its real name). We refer to it by the names of other things, calling it for example ‘receptacle’, ‘nurse’, ‘matter’ and ‘the underlying’, once again on the basis of analogy. In other words, Proclus holds that only at the most extreme ends of reality knowledge becomes impossible and hence naming needs to be done on the basis of analogy. In this respect he thus differs significantly from most Neoplatonists who believe that the entire intelligible realm has been named by means of analogy.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Proclus *In Tim.* I 324, 19–22.

<sup>18</sup> Proclus *In Parm.* VII 512, 7–20 ed. Steel; on this passage cf. Steel 2004: 617–618.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Crat.* CXIII esp. p. 66, 16–20: “For their nature does not allow it that they are known through names, but the theologians indicate these from afar by means of the analogy between the *phainomena* and these. But if it had been possible to name these and to grasp them by means of knowledge, we would have given an exposition about their names too.”

<sup>20</sup> See pp. 70–72.

To answer Proclus' initial question, then, the gods call each other names from the level at which knowledge of the individual entities is possible onwards. So both the ancients who claimed that there exist names among the gods themselves and those who held that the gods transcended this form of designation were partly right. Some gods do, and others do not. Since knowledge is especially associated with Intellect, it is, as appeared from the discussion of the Demiurge as the first name-giver, especially this level of the divine that is associated with naming. However, we have now seen that naming starts much earlier. All this may be summarized in the following scheme.

<i>Triadic structure</i>	<i>Expression</i>	<i>Ontological Level</i>	<i>(Orphic) Name</i>
ἐνοειδὲς ὑπαρξίς	ineffable	One/ Henads	'Chronos'*  'Ether'* 'Chaos'*
δύναμις / φῶς	ineffable effable	intelligible gods intellectual member of intelligible Gods	'Egg'* Phanes
Νοῦς	effable	intelligible-and- intellectual gods intellectual gods	Uranus  Cronus Zeus
*Name by analogy			

*Figure 1: The procession of the divine and the origin of divine names*

The gods are immaterial and hence we should rule out the possibility that they actually speak to each other or to us by modulating air with their speech organs. This presents a problem to Proclus, who assumes that some of these divine names have actually been revealed to us through oracles. But how may we hear these names, if the gods do not speak physically? He addresses this problem in the notes immediately following the present one, which we shall treat below. For the moment it suffices to know that Proclus assumes that these names may reach

us through the intermediary of lower classes of divine beings. These names are thus the product of divine inspiration (ἐνθουσιάζουσιν περὶ τοὺς θεούς) and come about when we unite our thinking to the divine light, i.e. the power that emanates from the gods. Proclus distinguishes these from the names that have been given by the expert human name-givers based on their scientific knowledge (κατ' ἐπιστήμην ἐνεργοῦσαι).<sup>21</sup> Proclus places great value on these divine names both for ritual and didactic purposes:

**T. 6.4**...the divine names that have come to us, by which the gods are invoked and by which they are celebrated (ἀνυμνοῦνται), which appeared from the gods themselves and which revert back on them, and which, to the degree that they are clear, produce human knowledge. For by means of these we can signify to each other something about them and talk among ourselves about them (*In Crat.* LXXI pp. 31, 29–32, 5).

Proclus gives some examples of such inspired names, like “the mediating name of the *iunges*” (p. 33, 14 f.: τὸ διαπύρθμον ὄνομα τῶν ἰγγῶν), a divine name revealed by the gods in the *Chaldaean Oracles*. However, the divine names of the Orphic tradition, such as Phanes (**T. 6.3**), are equally good examples of divine names by which the gods are celebrated (**T. 6.4** ἀνυμνοῦνται). As we shall see, the names from this Orphic tradition will be at the center of Proclus’ attention in the last part of the commentary.

Proclus assumes that Homer and the other poets oppose these divinely inspired names to the names that mortals give them on the basis of sense-perception and opinion (p. 34, 12: ἐκ τῆς αἰσθήσεως καὶ δόξης). In combination with the man-made names that are based on scientific knowledge, this leaves us with the following four types of divine names, three of which are man-made:<sup>22</sup>

1. Divine names used by the gods themselves.
2. Man-made divine names that are the product of divine inspiration.

<sup>21</sup> For the distinction of names based on divine inspiration and scientific knowledge, see *In Crat.* LXXI p. 34, 2–7; cf. *Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 124, 7–12 (the human name-givers who coin names for the gods proceed ὅτε μὲν ἐνθέως ὅτε δὲ νοερώς).

<sup>22</sup> For the same division into three types of man-made divine names, see Proclus *In Tim.* I 272, 10–274, 20 (and particularly pp. 273, 25–27) in which Proclus refers to the same passage from the *Cratylus* about the human and divine names in order to illustrate that since the knowledge of the gods differs from that of the mortals, so do divine names from their human counterparts (*In Tim.* I 274, 6–9).

3. Man-made divine names that are the product of (human) scientific knowledge.
4. Man-made divine names that are the product of (human) sense-perception and opinion.

Since the quality of a name depends of the quality of the knowledge expressed by it, it is evident that divine names based on divine knowledge are superior by far, whereas names based on sense-perception and opinion are inferior. Proclus elaborates on this when he ends *In Crat.* LXXI by doing what Socrates thought was impossible, i.e. by explaining why the divine names in Homer are more correct than their human equivalents. In the case of the river Ξάνθος, for example, Proclus explains that the gods know the causes of things. They therefore call the river Ξάνθος, since its water causes animals to turn yellow (ξανθοτέραν χροάν) when they drink from it, as Aristotle says (*HA* III 12 519a18–20). The human equivalent Σκάμανδρος, on the other hand, is based on the appearance (φαινόμενον) of the river: its water (ὔδωρ) goes through a man-made basin (σκάφη), and hence superficially thinking people (τῶν επιπολαίως νοούντων ἀνθρώπων) have called it Σκάμανδρος.

Another interesting example of divine and man-made names for one and the same thing, expressing different types of knowledge, is Proclus' discussion of the names of the universe in his *Commentary on the Timaeus*.<sup>23</sup> In Plato *Ti.* 28b3–5 Timaeus refers to the world as “the heaven (οὐρανός) or world (κόσμος)—let us call it by whatsoever name may be most acceptable to it” (trans. Cornford). To Proclus this is an important passage, for he assumes that this is the fifth and final of the axioms on which Timaeus' subsequent account is based.<sup>24</sup> From this passage Proclus concludes that there are three names for the universe: the names οὐρανός and κόσμος and a third name, “the most acceptable one”, a description of an ineffable name of the universe known only to the gods. The names οὐρανός and κόσμος, thus Proclus, refer to qualities about the world that are clear (φανερά) and known (γνωρίσματα) to us, i.e. they can be apprehended by our discursive way of thinking.

<sup>23</sup> *In Tim.* I 272, 7–274, 32; for a discussion of this passage, cf. Pinchard 2003: 240–242.

<sup>24</sup> On Proclus' assumption that Timaeus starts his account *more geometrico* by postulating five axioms, see Steel 2003b and especially pp. 186–187 for this axiom regarding the name.

Its secret name refers to the transcendent element of the cosmos, the part of it that is forever rooted in the realm of Being.<sup>25</sup> Proclus resorts to his beloved comparison of names to theurgical statues to illustrate his point: these statues contain magical symbols, some attached to the outside of the statue, others hidden inside it. Likewise, the cosmos, a giant statue of the intelligible world, contains those hidden symbols that link it to the intelligible. These symbols are unknown to us, at least to our rational faculties, yet known to the gods, since they are capable of the type of knowledge that these things require. There are thus, in the case of one and the same thing, secret divine names for the divine elements in it, discursive names for what can be known discursively, and names based on opinion for what can be opined about it. “Just as the types of knowledge among the gods differ from those among the divided souls, likewise the divine names that reveal the whole essence of the things named are different from the human names that touch on those things only in a divided fashion.”<sup>26</sup>

### 3. *Divine language: a paradox?* (In *Crat.* LXXII–LXXIX)

Proclus’ theory that there exist names even at the level of the gods themselves may seem paradoxical. Proclus shows himself aware of this and addresses the issue in *In Crat.* LXXII–LXXIX. The main problem is how it can make sense to assume the existence of divine speech. If what Plato says in *Phaedrus* 247c is right, i.e. that the gods are “without shape, color and impalpable”, we have to assume that they lack τὸ διαλεκτικὸν ἔργον, contrary to the creatures here below in the material world.<sup>27</sup> Proclus does not mean that these gods do not do dialectic—the god Cronus is after all the great dialectician—, but that they do not talk with others in the physical sense of the word.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Damascius takes up this point in order to elaborate on it when he complains that names never capture a complete thing, e.g. κόσμος only captures an ἰδιότης (distinctive characteristic) of its object (its being ordered), not all aspects of it (cf. Sorabji 2004 vol. III pp. 226–227 on Damascius *Princip.* II 198, 10–199, 20).

<sup>26</sup> Proclus *In Tim.* I 274, 6–9. For the existence of divine and man-made names for the same things, Proclus refers to the discussion of divine and human names in Homer in the *Cratylus*.

<sup>27</sup> *In Crat.* LXXII p. 35, 16–19.

<sup>28</sup> The context about talking and listening requires this interpretation of τὸ διαλεκτικὸν ἔργον, rather than ‘dialectical activity’ in the sense of philosophical dialectic (cf. Romano 1989: 35: “l’attività dialettica”; Álvarez Hoz *et al.* 1999: “la actividad

For in order to talk and to hear what someone says, i.e. to make and receive sounds, modulations of physical air, one supposedly needs a physical body, i.e. have shape and color, and be palpable. What is more, the gods do not even need to talk in order to communicate with each other. They simply know each other's thoughts. The human souls, because they have fallen away from the intelligible realm into the world of becoming, need language in order to communicate their thoughts. Proclus' hints at this in *In Crat.* LI p. 20, 19–20 when he mentions the communion (κοινωνία) that human language produces, a theme that Simplicius will develop further.<sup>29</sup>

Proclus thus, quite remarkably, holds both that the gods have names for each other, and that language is a typical human feature that we need because of our inferior ontological position. How we may reconcile these two conflicting claims, Proclus does not say. He explains, however, how gods and mortals communicate by means of language. That we do is sufficiently clear: the gods talk to us, for example in the case of oracles (*In Crat.* LXXVII p. 36, 25ff.; cf. e.g. *In Crat.* CIX p. 59, 19: αἱ θεοπαράδοτοι φῆμαι), whereas we talk back to them, for example in prayers (*In Crat.* LXXIII p. 35, 24–26). Proclus first considers one possible answer to the question how the gods speak to us. Perhaps it is not them that speak but daemons that are equipped with a body? Proclus *In Crat.* LXXVI rejects this solution. Since these names play a role in rites directed to the gods themselves, we can safely discard this solution. In *In Crat.* LXXVII Proclus suggests that when the gods talk to us, they do not need bodily organs at all, but that they generate sounds by shaping the air by means of their will. Air receives as it were imprints from the divine thoughts, as if air were some sort of wax, which results in sounds and modulation. It is in this way, Proclus concludes, that the gods give us oracles. They do not speak themselves, but they shape the air without touching it.<sup>30</sup>

---

dialéctica"). For διάλεκτος in the sense of spoken language, see, e.g., *In Crat.* LVII (= **T. 5.15**) discussed above where "the rulers of the various regions rejoice in the dialects their own places". Cf. also Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI p. 32, 7–9 where the γλώσσα of the Chaldeans and the Indians is compared to the διάλεκτος of the Greeks; Proclus *In Crat.* LXXXV p. 39, 12–14 where Proclus discusses the differences between Greek dialects (τὰς τῶν διαλέκτων διαφοράς); cf. further Ammonius *In Int.* 63, 4–5 (trans. Blank): "[the organs] of language (διαλέκτου) are the tongue, the palate, and the other organs which are said in this way to be 'voiced' or 'linguistic' (οὕτωςι λεγόμενα φωνητικὰ ἢ διαλεκτικὰ ὄργανα)."

<sup>29</sup> Cf. chapter seven § 2.3.

<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to compare this text to Proclus *In Alc.* 79, 17–80, 22, where Proclus

On the other hand, the gods do not need to actually hear the sounds that we utter in order to hear us. Proclus explains that the gods hear our prayers, not as a sound coming “from without”,<sup>31</sup> but because they know in advance what we are going to ask. Proclus stresses that this even holds true for visible gods with a body, such as the Sun and the Moon, who have the capacity of seeing and hearing, “but not from without”.<sup>32</sup> They know from within, since they carry in themselves the “roots and causes” of the universe, and therefore know beforehand what will happen. This is what Homer means when he says that the Sun sees and hears everything (*Il.* 3, 277).—Proclus remarks in the passing that an indication for this is that the Moon, an image of the Sun, seems to have ears and eyes, but lacks a nose and a mouth, for the faculties of smell and taste do not belong to these gods.—*In Crat.* LXXIX, finally, still concentrating on the case of the all-seeing and all-hearing Sun, Proclus points out that knowledge about the divine is transmitted to us through intermediary beings. Odysseus, e.g., is informed about the content of the discussion between Zeus and Helios through the intermediary of the archangel Hermes and the nymph Calypso (*Od.* 12, 374–90). This whole issue of talking gods, which may seem irrelevant issue to us, especially in the context of a discussion of the *Cratylus*, was a serious matter to a philosopher-theologian such as Proclus. Since he assumes that a part of our theological knowledge consists in revealed divine names, he has to explain how these may come about in the first place. Since he assumes that one may only successfully philosophize when guided by the gods, he feels the need to explain how the gods may actually perceive our prayers for their assistance.<sup>33</sup>

---

discusses the fact that Socrates’ daemon speaks to him. There, his explanation is a different one. Socrates receives a daemonic illumination, which particularly targets his intelligence, but it also works on other parts of Socrates, for example on his sense-organs. Since each part of Socrates receives these illuminations in its own manner, in the case of the sense of hearing, this will result in Socrates hearing a sound. However, this is not a sound from without (ἔξωθεν), but from within. For the idea that the receiving medium determines the form in which we perceive of the illumination, cf. Proclus *In Crat.* LXXI p. 31, 12–17.

<sup>31</sup> *In Crat.* LXXIII p. 35, 25: ἀκούουσι οὐκ ἔξωθεν.

<sup>32</sup> *In Crat.* LXXVIII p. 37, 10: ἀλλ’ οὐκ ἔξωθεν.

<sup>33</sup> For examples of Proclus’ prayers to the gods that they may guide his philosophical studies, see, e.g., Van den Berg 2001: 208–223 (a discussion of Proclus’ *Hymn to the Muses*).

#### 4. *Proclus' commentary on the etymological section*

A detailed discussion of how Proclus' interprets each and every etymology of a divine name in the *Cratylus* would take us deep into the dark forests of Neoplatonic theology. Interesting as this adventure may be in its own right, we would, I fear, end up not seeing the wood for the trees and lose sight of our main concern here, the reconstruction of Proclus' interpretation of the *Cratylus* as such.<sup>34</sup> Instead, I shall concentrate on what I believe to be the two central issues for Proclus in this part of the dialogue and discuss some of Proclus' interpretation of Plato's etymologies by way of illustration.

The first issue concerns the question why Proclus paid so much attention to these etymologies in the first place. The interest for this particular section in modern scholarly literature on the *Cratylus* is after all only a recent development in response to its neglect by previous generations of scholars. I shall argue that Proclus' interest in these etymologies was particularly motivated by his ambition to compose a Platonic theology. To Proclus, the etymological section contained valuable elements for the construction of such a theology. By way of illustration I shall discuss Proclus' interpretations of the etymologies of the names of Zeus and Uranus. The former case will be instructive for the way in which Proclus looks for Neoplatonic theology in Plato's dialogue, the latter for the role that these etymologies may play in Neoplatonic theological debates.

The second issue concerns the pedagogical value of etymologies. I shall argue that Proclus, against Plato, but in keeping with an existing pedagogical practice, assumes that the study of mythology by means of etymology from a philosophical perspective presents a good starting point for the education of philosophical novices such as Hermogenes. This will be illustrated by a discussion of Proclus' commentary on the names of the young gods Dionysus and Aphrodite.

Finally, the study of Proclus' treatment of these names will bring to light the connection between the study of names and Neoplatonic-Orphic soteriology. This will bring us back to the aim of the *Cratylus* that was discussed at the very beginning of the *Commentary*.

---

<sup>34</sup> Brisson 2002a and Brisson 2004 on *In Crat.* CVII–CIX (on Cronus) offer very detailed discussions of the theological content of parts of the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. In Van den Berg 2003, I study Proclus' notes on the goddesses Rhea, Demeter, Hera and Persephone in the *Commentary*. Abatte 2001: 96–114 discusses the etymologies of the names of Zeus, Cronus, Uranus, and Apollo.



### 5. *The theological function of etymology*

#### 5.1 Proclus' theological perspective on the *Cratylus* (*In Crat.* XCVI)

When we wish to fully understand Proclus' approach to the *Cratylus*, it is first of all important to take note of the theological perspective on philosophy that is so characteristic of the Athenian Neoplatonists. As H. D. Saffrey has shown, the Athenian school had made it its project to harmonize various supposedly sacred texts, such as those by Homer, Pythagoras, Orpheus, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*, with the philosophy of Plato.<sup>35</sup> They were all supposed to be divinely inspired, actually telling the same things but in different manners. It was the task of the Neoplatonic philosopher to bring out this harmony. As part of this program, Proclus set out to construct a rational theology on the basis of Plato's writings and to demonstrate its correctness by showing that it is in harmony with the theologies of authoritative figures from a mythical past. This project would eventually culminate in his monumental *Platonic Theology*.

It is within the larger context of this project that we should situate Proclus' interest in the etymologies of divine names in the *Cratylus*. In the first book of the *Platonic Theology*, Proclus explicitly discusses the role of the *Cratylus* in this undertaking. In *Theol. Plat.* I 5, a chapter in which he surveys the contribution that the various dialogues make towards the composition of a Platonic theology, Proclus remarks about our dialogue:

**T. 6.5** About the individual characteristics of the gods, we shall hunt down many holy ideas in the *Symposium*, many in the *Cratylus* and also many in the *Phaedo*, for each of these produces a recollection to a greater or smaller degree of the divine names from which those who have exercised themselves in the study of the divine can easily grasp the individual characteristics of the gods by means of reasoning (τὰς ιδιότητας αὐτῶν τῷ λογισμῷ περιλαμβάνειν) (*Theol. Plat.* I 5, p. 25, 18–23).

Furthermore, Proclus dedicates the final chapter of book one, *Theol. Plat.* I 29, to a discussion of the study of divine names. As Proclus himself remarks, this chapter is informed by the *Cratylus*.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, everything that is said in that chapter is repeated in the *Commentary on*

<sup>35</sup> On this project, see Saffrey 1992.

<sup>36</sup> *Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 123, 20–21: Καὶ γὰρ ὁ ἐν τῷ Κρατύλῳ Σωκράτης τὴν ὁρθότητα τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐν τοῖς θείοις διαφερόντως ἐκφαίνειν ἄξιον.

the *Cratylus*. We have already come across this chapter of the *Platonic Theology* when we discussed Proclus' comparison of divine names to divine statues.<sup>37</sup> Divine names, we saw there, are like divine statues in that we can learn something about the divine from them. Interestingly, Proclus says that we do so “by means of reasoning” (**T. 6.5**), not by some kind of illumination as some have argued.<sup>38</sup> Theology is after all a science and this presupposes a rational scientific approach and by definition a rational account (a λόγος).

Only on one issue the discussion of the *Cratylus* in the *Platonic Theology* seems to differ slightly from the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. According to *Theol. Plat.* I 29, names thus analyzed reveal “the hidden essence (τὴν ἀποκεκρυμμένην οὐσίαν) of the gods”.<sup>39</sup> However, at beginning of his exploration of the etymologies of divine names in the *Cratylus*, when commenting on *Crat.* 396a where Socrates moves from the names of the members of the house of Tantalus to those of Zeus and others gods, Proclus observes

**T. 6.6** That Socrates, by analyzing them, deduces from the divine names, which are like statues of the gods, their powers and activities. For he refrains from examining their essences (τὰς οὐσίας αὐτῶν) since he considers these to be ineffable and unknowable except to the flower of intellect (*In Crat.* XCVI p. 47, 12–16).

Proclus here thus clearly denies that divine names instruct us about the essences of the gods. The reason for this is that the essences of the gods can only be contemplated by a special, supra-rational mystical faculty of our soul, “the flower of intellect”,<sup>40</sup> but are unknowable to our discursive soul and hence cannot be expressed in a human name. Be this as it may, it is clear that Proclus considered the *Cratylus* as an important supplier of pieces of theological wisdom.

## 5.2 Neoplatonic theology and Orphic theogony

It might be argued, however, that the *Cratylus* played an even more fundamental role in the construction of a Platonic theology. Some of Proclus contemporaries considered this grant theological project of the Athenian Neoplatonists to be basically flawed. Plato, its critics objected,

<sup>37</sup> See pp. 141–142.

<sup>38</sup> See p. 141 n. 24 above.

<sup>39</sup> See **T. 5.4**.

<sup>40</sup> *In Crat.* XCVI p. 47, 15–16: μόνῳ τῷ ἄνθει τοῦ νοῦ θεωρεῖν.

had after all never written anything like a systematic theology. Proclus responded triumphantly to them that they had been proven wrong by the revolutionary interpretation of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* by his very own teacher Syrianus, "he who became my guide in philosophy at Athens and who kindled in me an intellectual light".<sup>41</sup> The latter had argued that this second hypothesis in fact constitutes a philosophical version of a theogony. Just as the theogonies present a genealogy of the gods, Plato likewise gives in the *Parmenides* all the stages of procession from the One downwards, including all classes of divine beings:

**T. 6.7** His view, then, also is that the first hypothesis is about the primal God, and the second is about the intelligible ones. But since there is a wide range in the intelligible world and there are many orders of gods, his view is that each of these divine orders has been named symbolically by Plato (συμβολικῶς ὑπὸ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ὀνομάζεσθαι), and all have been expressed by philosophic names (πάσας δι' ὀνομάτων φιλοσόφων), not by such names as are customarily celebrated by those who compose theogonies (ὑπὸ τῶν τὰς θεογονίας γραψάντων), neither by names which reveal their existence (ὑπάρξεις), such as are the significant names of the divine classes given out by the gods, but rather as I said, by names familiar to philosophers, such as 'Whole', 'Multiplicity', 'Limitlessness', 'Limit', which are suitable for application to them, all having their proper rank, and portraying without omission all the divine stages of procession, whether intelligible, intellectual, or supracosmic, and that thus all things are presented in logical order, as being symbols of divine orders of being. (*In Parm.* VI 1061, 35–1062, 11; trans. Morrow-Dillon 1987: 417 adapted).

As we have seen,<sup>42</sup> the supreme god, the One, has no name, and indeed it is only after the first god that Plato and the other authorities start calling the subsequent classes of gods names. Proclus here opposes the names given to these gods by Plato to the significant names (ἐπωνυμίας)<sup>43</sup> revealed by the gods themselves and those used by the "the composers of theogonies". Proclus has especially Orpheus in mind, whom he considers as the source of the entire Greek theological tradition, including Pythagoras and Plato.<sup>44</sup> Proclus was especially interested in

<sup>41</sup> *In Parm.* VI 1061, 25–27.

<sup>42</sup> See pp. 163–164.

<sup>43</sup> These names are called 'significant' because they teach us something about the gods. For this translation, cf. L.-S.-J. s.v. ἐπωνυμία.

<sup>44</sup> Proclus *Theol. Plat.* I 5 pp. 25, 26–26, 4: "the whole of Greek theology is an offspring of the mystagogy of Orpheus. First, Pythagoras learnt about the initiations

the part of Orpheus' theogony that describes the succession of six divine kings, to wit Phanes, Night, Uranus, Cronus, Zeus, and Dionysus. These will appear to play an important role in Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* in which he treats the entire Orphic theogony from Phanes down to Dionysus, since he believes that one cannot understand the etymologies without this background.<sup>45</sup>

Whatever one may think of Proclus' interpretation of the *Parmenides*,<sup>46</sup> his attempts to show that the *Parmenides* contained a philosophical theogony must have made the *Cratylus* especially valuable to him. He somehow needs to show that the names used by the philosophers and those by the theologians are in fact different names for the same entities. In this respect the *Cratylus* is most useful for it contains a philosophical interpretation of an Orphic theogony. As Socrates himself indicates, the series of divine names that he discusses is that of Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Crat.* 396c4: τὴν Ἡσίοδου γενεαλογίαν). He connects Hesiod explicitly to Orpheus (*Crat.* 402b5–c1) and quotes from the *Orphic Rhapsodies*.<sup>47</sup> When Socrates etymologizes these names, he turns as it were an Orphic theogony into Platonic philosophy.

At several places, Proclus stresses this relation between the *Cratylus* and the *Parmenides*. As we have seen, Proclus had already explicitly compared the *Cratylus* to the *Parmenides* in the prolegomena: both the *Cratylus* and the *Parmenides* combine a discussion of philosophical method with an instruction about reality.<sup>48</sup> However, whereas the *Parmenides*, being the final dialogue of the curriculum, presents us with a complete description of the divine world, the instruction offered in the *Cratylus* is limited to what we can learn from the divine names:

**T. 6.8** That in the *Cratylus* the great Plato does not have as his aim to celebrate the first, middle, and lowest realms of the gods, but only their characteristics as they appear from their names (τὰς ἐν τοῖς ὀνόμασιν αὐτῶν ἐκφαινομένας ιδιότητας) (*In Crat.* CLXVI p. 90, 24–27).

---

concerning the gods from Aglaophamos; secondly, Plato received the perfect knowledge concerning them from the Pythagorean and Orphic writings." On this relation between Orpheus and Plato and the shadowy figure of Aglaophamos, see Brisson 2002b, and esp. pp. 415–419 for this text. Cf. Proclus *In Tim.* III 168, 9–20.

<sup>45</sup> See, e.g., Proclus *In Crat.* XCIX pp. 48, 13–51, 13 and *In Crat.* CV pp. 54, 12–55, 22.

<sup>46</sup> For a (negative) evaluation of this interpretation, cf. C. Steel 2000; for **T. 6.7**, see esp. p. 382f.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. also *Crat.* 400c for the etymology of σῶμα by οἱ ἀμφὶ Ὀρφέα, cf. Baxter 1992: 101–102.

<sup>48</sup> See chapter five § 2.

Elsewhere, in *Theol. Plat.* IV 5, Proclus presents the *Cratylus* explicitly as Plato's adaptation of Orpheus' theogony:

**T. 6.9**... Plato himself in the *Cratylus*, following the Orphic theogonies (ταῖς Ὀρφικαῖς θεογονίαις ἐπόμενος), calls the father of Zeus 'Cronus', and the father of Cronus 'Uranus'. And he, chasing the truth about them by means of their names, declares that the first is the Father of the Universe, the second the container of the divine Intellect, and the third the thinking of the first thoughts. For, he says, Uranus is "the sight which sees what is above" (Ἡ γὰρ εἰς τὰ ἄνω φησὶν, ὁρῶσα ὅψις οὐρανός ἐστιν.) (Proclus *Theol. Plat.* IV 5, p. 21, 15–23).

Proclus' attempts to relate an ancient theogony to Plato's philosophy by means of etymology is less eccentric than one might be at first inclined to think. The *Cratylus* does in fact reflect contemporary attempts to interpret Orphic material in a philosophical manner. The best example of this tendency is the famous Derveni-papyrus, our oldest surviving Greek manuscript.<sup>49</sup> Among other things, this mutilated text offers an allegorical interpretation of a cosmogonic poem ascribed to Orpheus. According to R. Janko, the aim of its author was "to argue that conventional religious belief and practice, which may seem shocking or bizarre if taken literally, need to reinterpreted allegorically in order to reconcile them with the latest science of his day", that of the age of Greek enlightenment.<sup>50</sup> He did so by means of the favorite exegetical tools of his day, etymology and allegory. In fact, all this is not unlike Proclus' attempts nearly a thousand years later to harmonize Orpheus with the state of the art Neoplatonism of his own day. The method of the Derveni-papyrus may be illustrated by the explanation of the name 'Cronus'.

**T. 6.10** After Orpheus has named Mind (*Nous*) 'Cronus' because he thrust (*krouonta*) (the elements) against one another, he states that he "did a great deed" to Sky (*Uranus*): for he states that (Sky) had his kingship taken away. (Orpheus) named him 'Cronus' after this action, and (named) the other (elements) in accord with the same principle. . . . (Orpheus) states that (Sky) had his kingship taken away (when) the things that exist were thrust together).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> The resemblance of the Derveni-papyrus to the *Cratylus* has long been noted, yet the exact nature of their relation is a matter of debate, on which see Baxter 1992: 130–139.

<sup>50</sup> Janko 2001: 1–32; see p. 2 for this quotation.

<sup>51</sup> Col. XIV; trans. Janko 2001: 25; cf. Kahn 1997: 61f. on this etymology and its relation to the *Cratylus*.

The author apparently tried to reinterpret the traditional mythological theogony into a physical cosmogony. On the basis of an etymology he associates Cronus with the rational power Intellect that organizes the universe. The parallels with the *Cratylus* are evident, so evident in fact that Ch. Kahn has raised the question whether the source of Socrates' etymological inspiration in the *Cratylus*, the bigot Euthyphro, was in fact the author of the Derveni-papyrus.<sup>52</sup> Like the author of the Derveni-papyrus, Socrates in the *Cratylus* tries to turn offensive mythology into respectable, i.e. in his case Platonic, philosophy. He explicitly rejects etymologies that are based on a literal reading of myths and that make the gods look bad and obnoxious, like in the case of Cronus (*Crat.* 396b–c). When discussing the mythical theogony by Hesiod, Socrates denies that his name presents him as a (rebellious) child (*koros*) of Uranus. His name in fact indicates that Cronus is the pure cosmic Intellect. This can hardly be mere coincidence, for as the *Timaeus* testifies, the idea that the cosmos is the product of a rational cause was fundamental to Plato.<sup>53</sup> This philosophical approach to traditional mythology had a great future ahead of it, for, as we have seen in chapter two, it was to be taken up by the Stoics.

This is not to say that Plato himself approved of what people like the author of the Derveni-papyrus were doing. In fact he elsewhere makes it abundantly clear that he does not think much of these attempts to turn awkward mythological stories into proper philosophy by means of etymology and allegory.<sup>54</sup> It is not at all unlikely that, as some modern scholars assume, the etymologies in *Cratylus* are, at least in part, meant as an attack on people like the author of the Derveni-papyrus.<sup>55</sup> Below, when we come to the pedagogical function of the etymologies according to Proclus, we shall see that he was himself clearly aware of Plato's criticism of allegory. All the same this did not cause him to discard the etymologies from the *Cratylus* as sources of philosophical information.

---

<sup>52</sup> Kahn 1997 argues that Euthyphro was probably a member of some sort of Orphic sect.

<sup>53</sup> On the etymologies of Zeus, Ouranus and Cronus in the *Cratylus* and their relation to Plato's rational universe, see Sedley 2003: 90–96.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., Plato *Phdr.* 229c–230a; *R.* 378b8–e4. Proclus knows these passages well: the “battles and plotting among the gods” (cf. **T. 6.14**), e.g., recall *R.* 378b8–c1 (ὡς θεοὶ θεοῖς πολεμοῦσιν τε καὶ ἐπιβουλεύουσι καὶ μάχονται).

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., Baxter 1992: 139 who considers the tradition of the Derveni papyrus as “a prime candidate as a target of the *Cratylus*”.

### 5.3 The name of Zeus explained (*In Crat.* XCIX; C–CII)

We shall now take a closer look at Proclus' treatment of some etymologies from Hesiod's theogony, to start with the etymology of the name of Zeus. Socrates' explanation of the name of Ζεύς hinges on the two declensions of the name, one of which has Ζῆνα in the accusative, the other Δία. Socrates argues that these two names constitute as it were a phrase (λόγος), which describes Zeus as “δι'ὃν ζῆν”, “through whom all creatures live”. He thus is the ruler and king of all (*Crat.* 396a–b).

How does Proclus turn this etymology into a piece of Neoplatonic philosophy? The obvious answer is that he reads his Neoplatonism into Socrates' words. In fact this is his declared strategy. As we have seen, Proclus demands that, in the case of the explanation of personal names, the philosophical etymologist departs from the εἶδος of a name and then looks how its ὕλη expresses it.<sup>56</sup> Not very surprisingly, the same principle now also applies to the explication of divine names. In **T. 6.5** we have already seen that according to Proclus those “who have exercised themselves in the study of the divine can easily grasp the individual characteristics of the gods”. In the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus indeed first gives an exposition of the relevant knowledge about the god whose name is to be discussed before he turns to the actual explanation of his name. In some cases he simply briefly presents the relevant information about a certain god. In *In Crat.* CX, e.g., Proclus offers a brief discussion of the Neoplatonic interpretation of the god Uranus, which “has been investigated in greater detail in other works” (p. 60, 7–8), and then sets out to explain the name on the basis of this discussion (“he is named thus because of...” etc. p. 60, 9).

In the case of his explanation of the name of Zeus, though, he offers more of a justification for his breathtaking interpretative moves. Instead of summarizing an earlier discussion, he turns to the descriptions of Zeus that are offered by Greek theologians in order to establish both the exact place of Zeus in the metaphysical hierarchy and his functions (*In Crat.* XCVII–XCIX). In Plato's *Timaeus* the Demiurge calls himself the “Father of gods and works” (*Ti.* 41a; cf. Proclus *In Crat.* XCVIII p. 48, 5–6). The Demiurge thus recalls the god Zeus from the Orphic and Homeric poems, in which Zeus is presented as the king and father

---

<sup>56</sup> See pp. 128–130.

of the other gods. From this Proclus concludes that “therefore we reasonably claim (εἰκότως φαμέν) that the Demiurge in the *Timaeus* is the great Zeus.”<sup>57</sup> Proclus assumes that we need this discussion as necessary preliminary information in order to fully appreciate Socrates’ discussion of the name of Zeus in the *Cratylus*. He ends his discussion about the identification of Zeus with the Demiurge thus:

**T. 6.11** Now then, let us investigate how Socrates reveals the mystical truth about this god from his names, holding as if “to a safe rope” (*Lg.* 893b), to this notion (ἔννοια) about the supreme Zeus, that he is the Demiurge and the Father of this universe and that he is the unparticipated and completely perfect Intellect and that he fills all with life and the other good things (*In Crat.* XCIX p. 51, 8–13).

‘Notions’ play an important role in ancient theology from the Hellenistic age onwards. The Stoics in particular held that we have natural notions of the divine, formed in our minds on the basis of repeated experience of the world around us. These empirical origins guarantee their correctness. Their precise role in Stoic theology is debated. Some scholars believe that these notions might function as the starting point for deductive proof, while others deny this. However, all agree that the Stoics regarded such notions as a criterion of truth, which they used to test certain given opinions and conceptions.<sup>58</sup>

Proclus here first outlines the notion about Zeus for much the same reason: it is the “the safe rope”, the criterion, that will guide his discussion of the passage from the *Cratylus*. Yet, Proclus is not a Stoic. As we have seen in chapter three § 4.1, he is firmly convinced that sense-perception can never produce reliable notions. Instead, he assumes that we derive these notions from studying mythology. In the *Platonic Theology* Proclus explains how this works.<sup>59</sup> Whereas philosophical argument targets the intellectual part of our soul (τὸ νοερόν τῆς ψυχῆς), mythology appeals to the divine part of our soul (τὸ θεῖον τῆς ψυχῆς) that has some kind of sympathetic relation to the divine:

**T. 6.12** For other forms of discourse make us appear like people who are forced to accept the truth, but myths cause us to experience something

<sup>57</sup> *In Crat.* XCIX p. 50, 18–19.

<sup>58</sup> Brittain 2005, e.g., argues that the Stoics used these notions as starting points for deductive proof; *contra* Algra 2004: 174–175, from whose description of Stoic theological notions I borrow here.

<sup>59</sup> *Theol. Plat.* I 6 p. 28, 25–29, 10.



ineffable and to project correct notions (τὰς ἀδιαστρόφους ἐννοίας)<sup>60</sup> while we worship the mystical element contained in these (*Theol. Plat.* I 6 p. 29, 7–10).<sup>61</sup>

The distinction that Proclus here draws between arguments that force us to accept something and mythology that moves us in a special way is the same as that between the compelling argument against Hermogenes and the persuasive one: the former forced Hermogenes to accept the natural correctness of names, the latter, by means of an appeal to Homeric mythology, persuaded him of it.<sup>62</sup>

Proclus does not only differ from the Stoics in that he assumes that we derive our theological notions from mythology instead of sense-perception. According to the Stoa, the empirical origins of these theological notions guarantee their correctness. What is more, since the Stoa assumes that human minds are all structured alike and all work alike, they also assume that we shall all arrive at the same notions, provided that we keep clear of wrong reasoning and external ideological influences.<sup>63</sup> With Proclus this is different: only those who have prepared themselves properly, i.e. those who have turned away their attention from the material realm towards the intelligible divine, will be able to arrive at these correct notions about the gods. Below, we shall find that Proclus assumes that Socrates in the *Cratylus* helps Hermogenes to purify his mind in such a way that he arrives at the proper notions about the gods.

Let us return to Proclus' discussion of the name of Zeus. The discussion as it has been preserved in *In Crat.* C–CI is in its present form difficult to follow. It helps considerably, though, to read it side by side with Proclus *Theol. Plat.* V 22. As we have just seen, Proclus in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* begins his discussion of the name of Zeus by showing that Zeus is the Demiurge from the *Timaeus*. Proclus in *Theol. Plat.* V 20 likewise examines the identity of the Demiurge, i.e. the question “how he should be named in accordance with the Hellenic theology”, a good illustration in point of Proclus' desire to translate

<sup>60</sup> For the meaning of ἀδιαστροφή, see the note by Saffrey-Westerink *ad loc.*

<sup>61</sup> For the impact of mythology on the soul that has the right disposition towards it, cf. Proclus *In RP.* I p. 83, 15–84, 2, on which cf. Van den Berg 2001: 94. Cf. Damascius *In Phd.* I § 525: “Why do we enjoy myths?—Because we have innate notions (*logoi*) which are images of reality.”

<sup>62</sup> See chapter four § 7.2.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Algra 2003: 157.

terms from Plato's philosophy into theological names.<sup>64</sup> From this examination he concludes that it is crystal clear (καταφανές) that the Demiurge from the *Timaeus* is the supreme Zeus.<sup>65</sup> In corroboration of this point he adduces other Platonic passages, including the discussion from the *Cratylus*.

Among other things, he points to the fact that both the *Timaeus* and the *Cratylus* say that it is difficult to obtain knowledge of the Demiurge. According to *Ti.* 28c4–5 it is quite a task to find him, and once found it is impossible to declare him to all mankind, whereas according to *Crat.* 396a it is not easy to understand why Zeus' name is such a fine one.<sup>66</sup> In *Crat.* C likewise compares these two passages, yet in a condensed form.

Both in *Theol. Plat.* V 22 and in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus next proceeds by comparing the evidence from the *Cratylus* to other theological traditions and especially to the *Chaldaean Oracles*. For Proclus, the double name of Zeus reveals that he unites two functions into one. On the one hand, he is the final cause of the universe; on the other hand he is the source of life. This is apparent from the double accusative of the name of Zeus. According to Proclus, Δία/δι' ὄν refers to the fact that the Demiurge is the final cause, whereas, Ζῆνα/ζῆν refers to the fact that the Demiurge is also the source of life. Both the *Commentary on the Cratylus* and the *Platonic Theology* make this point.<sup>67</sup> *Theol. Plat.* V 22 then continues by comparing the *Cratylus* to "the other theologians", i.e. *Chaldaean Oracles* Frg. 8, according to which the Dyad sits besides Zeus.<sup>68</sup> The name 'Dyad' is, of course, interpreted by Proclus as another indication of the double nature of Zeus. The same oracle is quoted in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*.<sup>69</sup> The exegesis of the name of Zeus in *Theol. Plat.* V and the *Commentary on the Cratylus* thus illustrate that Proclus assumes that the etymologies from the *Cratylus* are not without philosophical interest. They should be read in connection with the rest

<sup>64</sup> *Theol. Plat.* V 20 p. 72, 12–13: καὶ ὅπως αὐτὸν ἐπονομάζειν προσήκει κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν θεολογίαν; Cf. *Theol. Plat.* V 20 p. 75, 20–26: the Demiurge is named Zeus "in the Greek tradition" (ὀνομάζειν κατὰ τὴν παρ' Ἑλλήσι φήμην), i.e., as Saffrey and Westerink explain, the Orphic tradition.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. **T. 6.11**: the adjective 'supreme' indicates that this is most senior of all manifestations of Zeus that Proclus believes to exist.

<sup>66</sup> *Theol. Plat.* V 22 p. 81, 23–82, 5.

<sup>67</sup> In *Crat.* CI p. 52, 4–8; *Theol. Plat.* V 22 p. 83, 3–11 with useful notes by Saffrey-Westerink.

<sup>68</sup> *Theol. Plat.* V 22 p. 82, 10.

<sup>69</sup> In *Crat.* CI p. 51, 27–28.

of Plato's philosophy, in this case with the *Timaeus*. Moreover, they are a great help in connecting Plato's philosophy to the theological systems of Orpheus, Homer, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

Proclus completes his discussion of the name of Zeus by paying attention to a last detail concerning the ὕλη of the name (*In Crat.* CIII). As we have seen, Socrates builds his explanation of the name of Zeus on the two accusative forms of his names, κατ' αἰτιακὴν πτώσιν in Greek. Proclus explains that he does so because Zeus himself is an αἷτιος (cause).

#### 5.4 Proclus and Theodorus on names: The name of Uranus (*In Crat.* CX–CXIII)

According to Socrates in the *Cratylus*, Uranus' name is correctly given: “for the sight of what is above is well called by the name οὐρανία (‘heavenly’)—looking at the things above (ὀρῶσα τὰ ἄνω)—and astronomers say, Hermogenes, that that results in purity of intellect” (*Crat.* 396b–c).

Proclus begins his commentary by describing the nature of this god. He locates Uranus high in his metaphysical system, on the level of the intelligible-and-intellectual gods, above Zeus and Cronus, right below Phanes<sup>70</sup> He describes Uranus, the intelligible heaven (οὐρανός) as an “intellect (νοῦς) that even thinks itself, while being united to the first intelligibles and firmly rooted in these and containing (συνεκτικός) all the intellectual orders because it remains in this intelligible unity”.<sup>71</sup> He is the universal ‘container’ (συνοχεύς). As C. Steel has explained, this means that Uranus is the ultimate cause of all cohesion.<sup>72</sup> Proclus, “hunting down the truth concerning things on the basis of their names”,<sup>73</sup> explains that he is called after the visible heaven. Both the material and the divine heaven bind and hold together all things contained in them and they produce one single sympathy and coherence in the entire cosmos.<sup>74</sup> Proclus goes on to connect this interpretation of Uranus as the containing god to the topography of the heaven as

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Figure 1*.

<sup>71</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* CX p. 59, 22–25.

<sup>72</sup> On Uranus as the συνεκτικός cause, see further Steel 2002, whose discussion is particularly helpful for understanding this passage from the *Commentary on the Cratylus*.

<sup>73</sup> *In Crat.* CX p. 60, 19–20; cf. **T. 6.5** where the same image of hunting reappears.

<sup>74</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* CX p. 60, 9–12: ὠνόμασται δ' οὕτως καθ' ὁμοιότητα τοῦ φαινομένου οὐρανοῦ. ἐκάτερος γὰρ αὐτῶν σφίγγει καὶ συνέχει τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς περιεχόμενα πάντα, καὶ μίαν τὴν τοῦ ὅλου κόσμου ἀπεργάζονται συμπάθειαν καὶ συνέχειαν.

discussed in the famous myth from the *Phaedrus* (p. 60, 14: ἐν τῷ Φαίδρῳ) about the heavenly place where the gods dwell and contemplate the Forms. As H. D. Saffrey has shown, Syrianus was the first to connect the *Phaedrus*-myth to the succession of kings from the *Orphic Rhapsodies*. He did so in his course on the *Phaedrus* that has been recorded by Hermias, as well as in a now lost work entitled *The Harmony of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato with the Oracles in ten books*.<sup>75</sup> An essential element in this interpretation is the division of the heavenly place from the *Phaedrus* into three zones:

1. the supracelestial place
2. the celestial revolution
3. subcelestial dome.

Uranus, the god from the Orphic tradition is identified with (2.) the celestial revolution. This interpretation is briefly summarized in *In Crat.* CXII. Since the interpretation of Syrianus and Proclus was an innovation, it was bound to conflict with earlier Neoplatonic interpretations of the myth, like, e.g., that of Theodorus of Asine. The latter did not distinguish the supracelestial dome of the myth from the heaven itself, while assuming that this supracelestial dome/heaven (Uranus) came directly after the One itself, thus leaving no room for any class of gods in between the One and the (intelligible) heaven. Syrianus and Proclus rejected this interpretation. They pointed out that according to the Orphic tradition the reigns of Phanes and Night come before that of Uranus. Hence, Uranus cannot follow immediately after the One.

In *Theol. Plat.* IV 23, Proclus defends the interpretation by Syrianus, which the latter had put forward in his *Harmony* against this Theodorus of Asine. Theodorus had argued for his interpretation in a work entitled *On Names* (Περὶ ὀνομάτων). Proclus does not give us Theodorus' argument here, but from what he says elsewhere it appears that his approach involved the sounds and shapes of letters.<sup>76</sup> Proclus fights him with his own weapons by deriving an argument for his thesis that

<sup>75</sup> Saffrey-Westerink 1981 (= *Theol. Plat.* IV) xxix–xxxvii; Saffrey 1992: 43; cf. Hermias *In Phdr.* 148, 15–150, 15 and 154, 17–27; for Syrianus' *Harmony*, cf. Proclus *Theol. Plat.* IV 23 p. 69, 12–15.

<sup>76</sup> For Theodorus' argument, cf. Proclus *In Tim.* II 274, 18–23 and *In Parm.* VII pp. 508, 68–509, 97 ed. Steel (cf. Deuse 1973: 32–37); cf. Steel 2004: 620 for a discussion of Theodorus' theory.

there are gods in between the heaven and the One from the discussion of the name ‘Uranus’ in the *Cratylus*:

**T. 6.13** For Theodorus, since he says that the heaven (*Uranus*) is the first, can no longer accept that heaven is “the sight looking upwards”, as Socrates in the *Cratylus* has it (τὴν εἰς τὰ ἄνω ὀρώσαν ὄψιν, ὡς ὁ ἐν Κρατύλῳ Σωκράτης)—after all the first does not look, nor is it a sight, neither is it below something—therefore he can neither accept the explanation of that name nor the ‘supracelestial place’, as it is celebrated by an inspired Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (*Theol. Plat.* IV 23 p. 69, 16–22).

We have here, then, a fine example of two eminent Neoplatonists who philosophize on the basis of names, an indication that this method of doing philosophy was by no means confined to Proclus. Proclus’ argument with Theodorus explains why in the *Commentary on the Cratylus* he insists so strongly on the fact that it is evident (δηλαδὴ) that Uranus is characterized by the fact that he looks to the things above, i.e. the supracelestial place that is surrounded by “the god-nourishing silence of the Fathers” (= *Chaldaean Oracles* Frag. 16).<sup>77</sup>

We may have our doubts whether Proclus is right to claim that for Plato Uranus is “the sight looking upwards”, but he himself believes that the course of the *Cratylus* justifies his assumption. As we have seen, Proclus assumes that, with the exception of Phanes, it is impossible to name the intelligible gods located on the level of Being, since Being is an unified whole.<sup>78</sup> The realm of Being is the supracelestial place, i.e. the level of reality directly superior to Uranus. It is precisely this unity of Being from which Uranus derives his characteristic cohesive power.<sup>79</sup> According to Proclus, this is the reason why Socrates, after his discussion of the name of Uranus, says that he fails to remember the rest of Hesiod’s genealogy (*Crat.* 396c). The human soul cannot remember what it cannot know anyhow, be it as an object of fantasy, opinion, or discursive thinking. And since these gods can not been known, they cannot be named. Socrates therefore reasonably (p. 65, 29f.: εἰκότως) abstains from discussing these names. Lest no one thinks

<sup>77</sup> *In Crat.* CX p. 63, 24–26: this silence of the Fathers, i.e. of the intelligible gods is called ‘god-nourishing’ since it is the object of contemplation for gods such as Uranus, who derives his cohesive, containing power from this contemplation. Cf. for the same idea *Chaldaean Oracles* Frag. 17 = Proclus *In Tim.* I p. 18, 25.

<sup>78</sup> See § 2 above.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* CX p. 63, 17–19. On the unity of Being as the source of the cohesive power of Uranus, see Steel 2002.

that Socrates is lazy, Proclus assures us, “had it been possible to name these and grasp them by means of knowledge, then we would have discussed their names too”.<sup>80</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* CXV characteristically concludes this discussion by showing that Plato’s reluctance to discuss the names of the gods on the level of Being is in harmony with that of the theological authorities. Hesiod in his theogony mentions Chaos as the father of Uranus, but keeps silent about where Uranus came from. Likewise, the *Chaldaean Oracles* indicate that these gods are ineffable when they warn their public to “keep silent, initiate” (Frag. 132). In the same vein, Plato in the *Phaedrus* compares the contemplation of these to initiation into mysteries (μύησις), which were associated with secrecy and silence.

## 6. *The pedagogical function of etymology: names as playthings*

### 6.1 Proclus on myths as a means of education

Proclus’ interpretation of Socrates’ explanations of the names of Zeus and Uranus aptly illustrates the way in which Proclus uses these etymologies as sources of theological knowledge. Proclus is very much aware that his approach to divine names is problematic from a Platonic point of view: his method is based on an allegorical interpretation of Greek mythology, yet Plato himself had spoken out against allegory. In *Theol. Plat.* V 3, for instance, he raises the issue in connection to his allegorical interpretation of the mutilation of Cronus by Zeus:

**T. 6.14** No one should interrupt me when he hears these words with the following objection: “does Plato not discard the mutilations, the bonds and the tragic performances of myths?” Plato indeed believes that all these things confuse the ignorant masses because of their ignorance about the secrets contained in these, but that to the wise these hold some wonderful deeper meaning. For that reason, Plato himself does not undertake fiction in this fashion, yet he thinks that one should be persuaded (πείθεσθαι)<sup>81</sup> by the ancients, who are children of the gods, and hunt down their secret intention (Proclus *Theol. Plat.* V 3 p. 17, 22–5).

Whether or not convincing as an interpretation of Plato, this is Proclus’ standard line of defense of ancient mythology. Plato objects to exposing

<sup>80</sup> *In Crat.* CXIII p. 66, 19–20.

<sup>81</sup> Another reference to the persuasive powers of mythology, cf. p. 114 above.

the ignorant masses to mythology for it will confuse them. To avoid such confusion, Plato himself had written a kind of purified myths that do not contain such, seemingly, blasphemous elements. Yet, myths, since they are the products of divine inspiration, have a lot to offer to those who are able to see through their scandalous surface.<sup>82</sup> As we have seen (**T. 6.12**), Proclus trusts that myths may produce “correct notions” about the divine in the careful reader.

Given that this is Proclus’ standard view on mythology, it comes as a surprise to find that in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, Proclus assumes that Socrates in the *Cratylus* does use traditional mythology in order to educate the young. As we shall see below, he states this explicitly in *In Crat.* CXVI. His discussion of Socrates’ explanations of the names of Dionysus and Aphrodite shows that this was not a mere slip of the pen. Proclus, it will be argued below, discovers in the *Cratylus* an in his time well-tried method of preparatory philosophical education that takes mythology as its starting point.

## 6.2 Euthyphro’s inspiration (*In Crat.* CXVI)

Proclus *In Crat.* CXVI discusses Socrates’ claim that his unexpected gift for etymology is due to a temporary state of inspiration for which he blames Euthyphro (*Crat.* 396d). This Euthyphro is better known from the dialogue named after him, in which he is presented as a self-proclaimed religious expert, who takes the stories about the gods that Plato found so repulsive literally. Proclus refers to the *Euthyphro* when he distinguishes between three types of discourse about the gods. First, there are those who like Euthyphro fantasize irrationally (ἀλόγως φανταζόμενος) about all sorts of outrageous divine conduct. Euthyphro’s type of account is opposed to the scientific (ἐπιστημονικός) accounts about the gods, like those put forward by Socrates. In between these stands the discourse that from the opinion (δόξα) of the name-giver proceeds scientifically (ἐπιστημονικῶς) to the nature of the gods. At the same time, it has also something in common with the Euthyphro’s fantasies, apparently because it starts from his type mythology.

---

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Theol. Plat.* I 4 p. 21, 13–27: Plato rejects traditional mythology as an improper means of education, while composing himself some sort of purified mythology. On Proclus’ defense of allegorical interpretation, see further Sheppard 1980: 145–161 (“Allegory, Symbols and Mysteries”).

Proclus now explains why Socrates, even though he normally considers mythology to be unsuited for the ignorant masses, thinks it fit to pay attention to Euthyphro's myths. Socrates sees that many people, because of these myths, hold brutish notions (βοσκηματῶδεις ἔννοιαι) about the gods. He descends from his scientific activity in order to help those in the grasp of irrational fantasies to the intermediate level of understanding about the divine, thus using the discussion of these myths as an incentive to wake people like Hermogenes up to the search for the truth.

### 6.3 The names of Dionysus and Aphrodite (*In Crat.* CLXXXI–CLXXXIII)

Proclus points to Socrates' discussion of the names of Dionysus and Aphrodite as an example of his attempts to improve Hermogenes' flawed perception of the divine. Having been asked to explain the names of Dionysus and Aphrodite, Socrates, ironical as ever, tells Hermogenes that there are two types of explanation available of these names, a serious one and a playful (παιδικῶς) one. The serious explanations he leaves to others. He himself will go through the playful ones. After all, even the gods love play.<sup>83</sup> Dionysus' name is explained from the fact that he is "the giver of wine" (ὁ διδούς τὸν οἶνον). Wine (οἶνος) is named after its effect on the human soul: it makes one think that he understands (οἶεσθαι νοῦν ἔχειν > οἰόνον > οἶνος), whereas in fact one does not.<sup>84</sup> In the case of Aphrodite, Socrates simply agrees with Hesiod that she is called Ἀφροδίτη after the fact that she was born from foam (τὴν ἐκ τοῦ ἀφροῦ γένεσιν; cf. Hesiod *Th.* 187–200). This refers, of course, to the birth of Aphrodite from the foam that was generated when Cronus cast the genitals of the castrated Uranus into the sea (Plato *Crat.* 406b–d).

Proclus *In Crat.* CLXXXI starts by paraphrasing Socrates' explanation of the names of Dionysus and Aphrodite. He claims that Socrates wants to bring out that Dionysus and Aphrodite in their lowest manifestations are the cause of pleasure, strengthening the weakness of the mortal nature (probably by means of procreation, one of Aphrodite's

<sup>83</sup> Plato *Crat.* 406c2–3: φιλοπαίσιμονες γὰρ καὶ οἱ θεοί.

<sup>84</sup> Plato is perhaps hinting here at the etymological games played at symposia, see p. 47.



functions,<sup>85</sup> and helping us to bear the hardships due to an incarnated mode of existence. In this way, Proclus comments, Socrates “purifies our concepts about the gods” (διακαθαίρων ἡμῶν τὰς περὶ θεῶν ἐννοίας) and “prepares us to think (νοεῖν παρασκευάζων) that everything always looks towards the best end”.<sup>86</sup>

This purification of concepts prompts us to look beyond the obvious, literal sense of the ancient myths and the corresponding explanations of the names of the gods involved. Proclus *In Crat.* CLXXXII does so for the name of Dionysus. Proclus begins by observing that the theologians often call the gods by their most mundane gifts, as is the case for Dionysus. Orphic poetry, for instance, refers to Dionysus as ‘Wine’.<sup>87</sup> Yet these names are also appropriate in the case of higher manifestations of these gods, and once we realize that there actually exist these higher manifestations, we must try to explain why the divine names are appropriate in these cases too. This is, I assume, Proclus’ interpretation of the more serious type of explanation that Socrates had left to others. At the same time Proclus tacitly criticizes the Stoics who had also noticed that gods are often named after their gifts, but, who, because of their materialistic philosophy, did not try to connect these names to metaphysical entities.<sup>88</sup>

As appears from the etymology from the *Cratylus*, the name οἶνος as it is commonly understood (p. 108, 28: κοινῶς ἐξακουόμενος) refers to a mental state due to wine. Proclus now explains that on a higher level the οἶνος that Dionysus produces is the individual intellect that resembles the universal intellect. In that case, οἶνος means the individual intellect (p. 109, 8: σημαίνων τὸν οἶον καὶ τινὰ νοῦν). For, as Proclus continues to explain, Dionysus is the last Orphic King, and the leader

<sup>85</sup> On this function of Aphrodite, see, e.g., Plato *Smp.* 207a5ff. and Proclus *Hymn* II 11–12.

<sup>86</sup> *In Crat.* CLXXXI p. 108, 4–6.

<sup>87</sup> Proclus *In Crat.* CLXXXIII p. 108, 13–26. Cf. Olympiodorus *In Phd.* I § 6 where Olympiodorus, referring to a hymn by Proclus, explains that we often call gods after their gifts: “...just as we call Demeter wheat and Dionysus wine; for, as Proclus [*Hymns*, frg. 1] says: ‘What they saw in the children, they expressed in the parents’ names’.” (trans. Westerink).

<sup>88</sup> See, e.g., Cicero *DNR* II 24 for the observation that many gods were called after their gifts “by the wisest men of Greece and our forefathers” (*a Graeciae sapientissimis et a maioribus nostris*). The god Liber is, e.g., called wine (*appellamus vinum autem Liberum*). Algra 2003: 158 points out that the Stoics presumably believed that in giving divine names to what is useful, the early name-givers expressed an important notion about the gods, i.e. their providential care for humanity.

of the young gods. He is the demiurge who comes after the universal Demiurge Zeus, his father, and who is responsible for the creation of this material universe which is populated by individuals.

In the case of Proclus' explanation of the name of Aphrodite we find a comparable move. He starts his discussion of her name (*In Crat.* CLXXXIII) by claiming that it is possible for those who approach things in an intellectual way (νοερώτερον, i.e. in a philosophical manner) to be inspired even by "playful notions about the gods".<sup>89</sup> The approach of the many to this name is determined by their material mindset (κατὰ τὰς ἐνύλους τῶν πολλῶν ἐπιβολάς): they assume that the foam is sperm, and that the name of Aphrodite refers to the pleasure that is caused by the ejaculation of that sperm. But, wonders Proclus, who is so simple-minded that he does not look at the first and eternal causes (τὰ πρῶτα καὶ αἰδία αἴτια) instead of the lowest and perishable ones (πρὸ τῶν ἐσχάτων καὶ φθαρτῶν)? This is exactly, thus Proclus, the reason why Plato mentions Hesiod. If a divinely inspired sage says such seemingly scandalous things, it is clear that we should look beyond the surface for a more profound interpretation.<sup>90</sup>

Proclus' explanation of Aphrodite is very profound indeed. As we have seen, Aphrodite's unintentional father, Uranus is 'the connector', the source of all cohesion.<sup>91</sup> Aphrodite is thus interpreted as a cohesive force emanating from Uranus: she binds all things together by a universally shared desire for Beauty. Cronus represents Intellect, the indivisible communion of Forms which derives its cohesion from Uranus.<sup>92</sup> The foam (ἀφρός) from which they are said to have been born, does not represent sperm, but life in its most pure and united form, whereas the sea on which it floats represents life in its unfolded limitless form. The fact that the foam drifts on the sea shows that it is superior to the boundless sea.<sup>93</sup> To go short, then, Hermogenes has now learnt not to believe Euthyphro that the gods are literally fighting and mutilating each other, but that the notion that guided the name-givers was that the gods are productive powers.

<sup>89</sup> *In Crat.* CLXXXIII p. 109, 22–24: ἐκ τῶν παιγνιωδῶν ἐννοιῶν τῶν περὶ θεοῦς. Why Proclus calls these notions 'playful' will be discussed below.

<sup>90</sup> *In Crat.* CLXXXIII p. 110, 2–4: διὰ γὰρ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ Σωκράτης τὸν Ἡσίοδον μαρτύρεται ἵνα τῆς ἐνθεαστικῆς ἡμᾶς ἐπιβολῆς ἀναμνήσῃ.

<sup>91</sup> See § 2.4 above.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* CLXXXIII p. 109, 5–16.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. *In Crat.* CLXXXIII p. 111, 15–20.

#### 6.4 The tradition of etymology as a pedagogical instrument

It is worth pointing out that Proclus' use of etymology as a pedagogical instrument is not unprecedented. As is well known, Aristotle presents mythological narration as a precursor of philosophical speculation.<sup>94</sup> The Stoic appreciation of mythology and especially of divine names as expressions of philosophical ideas<sup>95</sup> in combination with the fact that every schoolboy was well acquainted with traditional mythology, made the discussion of traditional mythology from a philosophical point of view a logical first introduction into philosophy. The Stoic Cornutus' *Epidrome* is probably the best known example of the schoolbooks that were used to teach such introductory courses. It offers Stoicizing interpretations of traditional Greek mythology on the basis of etymologies. G.W. Most characterizes the work as a "first textbook in philosophy", which "establishes a continuity between the student's preceding grammatical studies and the philosophy to which he is now exposed".<sup>96</sup> Heraclitus the Paradoxographer's *On Unbelievable Tales*, in which the author sets out to rationalize Greek mythology, partly with the help of etymology, constitutes another example of this genre.<sup>97</sup>

#### 7. Play and salvation through names

When Socrates calls his explanations of the names of Aphrodite and Dionysus 'playful', he probably just meant that.<sup>98</sup> Proclus, however, associates 'play' both with the last Orphic king, the Demiurge Dionysus, and with two major themes of his interpretation of the *Cratylus*: the nature of names and the manner in which the study of names supports our philosophical descent.

Proclus hints at the demiurgical role of Dionysus in *In Crat.* CLXXXI p. 107, 18–24. Hermogenes, he says, seems to ask questions about Lord Dionysus as if it were only an insignificant matter. Since he does not take things as seriously as he should, Socrates does not tell him about the

<sup>94</sup> Aristotle *Metaph.* 982b12–19.

<sup>95</sup> See chapter two § 2.

<sup>96</sup> On the *Epidrome* as a schoolbook, see Most 1989: 2029–2034 ('Pedagogy').

<sup>97</sup> On this text, see Stern 2003: 51–97; on the role of etymology in this work, see pp. 60–62, for the interpretation of this work as the remains of a schoolbook analogous to Cornutus, see pp. 71–72.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. *Theol. Plat.* V 3 p. 16, 3–4: "And these things Plato shows in the *Cratylus*, while he is playing and being serious at the same time" with the remarks by Saffrey-Westerink *ad loc.* (p. 158 additional n. 1 to p. 158).

hidden emanations of the gods, but only about “their lowest, i.e. their encosmic emanations”, i.e. Dionysus as the “giver of wine”.<sup>99</sup> Proclus continues: “And even these the wise man glorifies, although he calls them ‘playthings’, by remarking that ‘those gods are fond of playing’ (= *Crat.* 406c2–3).”<sup>100</sup> In order to understand this remark properly it is important to recall that, as we have seen,<sup>101</sup> the young gods of whom Dionysus is the leader, are responsible for the second demiurgy, i.e. the creation of the material, encosmic universe.<sup>102</sup> According to Proclus, this creation of the material universe is the spontaneous effect of the secondary activities of the young gods, whereas their serious, primary activities consists in the contemplation of the intelligible.<sup>103</sup> For that reason, their creation is called a ‘plaything’, a term that Proclus has borrowed from Plato *Lg.* 803c4–5 (cf. *Lg.* 644d8), where it is said that “man is but a plaything of the gods” (θεοῦ τι παίγιον).

According to the Athenian Neoplatonists, myths are analogous to the material cosmos and may thus too be called playthings. Proclus explains:

**T. 6.15** [T]he products from the young demiurgy are called “playthings of the gods” and resemble myths (τὰ μὲν ἐκ τῆς νέας δημιουργίας παίγνια καλεῖται θεῶν καὶ μύθοις ἔοικεν)—for they are images of the real beings and they are the last to participate in the Forms, whereas the first productions are intellectual and eternal and stable and keep their essence hidden (Proclus *In RP.* I 127, 14–18).<sup>104</sup>

It is for this reason that Proclus remarked about the myth of Aphrodite’s birth that we may be inspired even by playful notions about the gods. What holds true for myths also holds true for one of their constituent parts, their names. In our discussion of the *Commentary on the Cratylus*, we have seen that names too are considered to be images of real beings, a final echo in acoustic matter of the latter. Moreover, we have also seen that the human name-giver imitates the demiurgy of the young gods, when he combines the form of a name with its matter.

<sup>99</sup> See § 6.3 above.

<sup>100</sup> *In Crat.* CLXXXI p. 107, 22–24.

<sup>101</sup> Chapter five § 4.3.

<sup>102</sup> Cf., e.g., Proclus *In Tim.* III 310, 9–311, 6. For a detailed discussion of Dionysus, see Opsomer 2003.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Proclus *In Parm.* V 1036, 4–9.

<sup>104</sup> On myths as playthings comparable to the material cosmos, see Opsomer 2003: 40–45, who apart from this text also discusses another relevant passage from Hermias, *In Phdr.* 260, 22–28.

King Dionysus also plays an important role in an important Orphic myth. According to this story, Hera plotted to have Dionysus, the fruit of one of Zeus' adulterous affairs, killed. At her instigation, the Titans attracted the attention of the infant Dionysus with a mirror and other playthings and then cut him into pieces and devoured him. Only his heart was rescued intact by Athena, who carried it off to his father Zeus. The latter stroke the Titans with his thunderbolts and from the heart created a new Dionysus. This myth inspired the later Neoplatonists to some very ingenious interpretations.<sup>105</sup> An important element in these is that we, humans, originate from Dionysus. According to Olympiodorus, our bodies originate from the soot of the vapors that arose from the thunder-struck Titans. Since these had just eaten the infant Dionysus, this soot ultimately originates from him. According to Olympiodorus this is the reason why suicide is forbidden: our bodies do not belong to ourselves, but to Dionysus. Since our bodies are not actually ours, neither is the decision to away with them.<sup>106</sup>

More important still, our intellect too originates from Dionysus. Proclus writes in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*:

**T. 6.16** That the intellect in us is Dionysian and a true statue of Dionysus. Therefore, whosoever sins against it and, like the Titans, tears apart the undivided nature of it by means of much-divided falsehood, clearly trespasses against Dionysus himself, even more so than those who sin against the external statues of the gods, just as much as the degree to which our intellect is more akin to the god than other things (*In Crat.* CXXXIII p. 77, 24–78, 3).

The moral lesson from the tale of Dionysus is clear enough: when we allow ourselves to get carried away by the “much-divided falsehoods” of by the world of becoming, i.e. the playthings that the Titans used to distract Dionysus, we do to our own Dionysus what the Titans did to the mythical Dionysus, i.e. we rip the most precious part of ourselves to pieces. Proclus says that we had better destroy a statue of Dionysus than do this, since our own intellect is more akin to him than are his statues.

This text reminds one of other passages from the *Commentary on the Cratylus* that we have come across. As we have seen Proclus was of the

<sup>105</sup> On the various Neoplatonic interpretation of this myth, see Pépin 1970, Brisson 2002a; cf. Van den Berg 2001: 288–293 (commentary on Proclus *H.* VII 11–15, a reference to the myth in the context of a hymn to Athena).

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Olympiodorus *In Phd.* 1 § 4.

opinion that there is a taboo on tinkering with names, since names are comparable to the statues of the god. They are akin to the gods precisely because they are the product of intellect.<sup>107</sup> All this points to the special role of names in the salvation of the human soul. According to the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Orphic myth of Dionysus, we have to follow the example of Lord Dionysus himself. In the end, out of Dionysus' heart Zeus created a new Dionysus, whom he then gave a safe place among the gods. We should likewise turn away from the Titanic world of becoming and ascend towards the world of Zeus, i.e. the realm of Intellect. The study of names is particularly helpful here. For as we saw at the very beginning of the *Commentary*, the aim of the dialogue is to make us aware of the powers of the human soul and its relation to the divine Intellect. It is a first step on the route that leads towards the realm of Zeus. There is a very instructive parallel here with mathematical objects. Just as is the case with names, the soul possesses the archetypes of the mathematical objects, and just as names are projections of these innate principles, so are the mathematical objects, such as circles and triangles, that the mathematician studies. They are projections of innate principles in the *phantasia*. Proclus compares the student of mathematics who looks at these to a man "looking at himself in a mirror and marveling at the power of nature and at his own appearance". Such a man "should wish to look upon himself directly and possess such a power as would enable him to become at the same time the seer and the object seen". Likewise, the mathematician's soul, when it comes to realize that it is actually admiring reflections from itself, dismisses these "and seeks its own beauty. Its wants to penetrate within itself to see the circle and the triangle there."<sup>108</sup>

Names and myths are playthings, we are not supposed to become so interested in them for their own sake that we forget about their origins. After we have seen them for what they really are, we stop playing around and get serious, just like small children that grow up lose their interest in toys. And so, despite all the theological song and dance, Proclus' final conclusion about the ultimate lesson of the *Cratylus* comes close to that of many modern scholars: that we have to leave the study of names for what it is and start examining those things of which they are images, their intelligible paradigms.

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g., *In Crat.* LI p. 19, 20–24 discussed at pp. 140–141.

<sup>108</sup> Proclus *In Euclid.* 141, 17–20; for a discussion of this text, see Steel 1997a: 305.

8. *Proclus on the hermeneutics of divine names: concluding remarks*

To Proclus the study of divine names is a not inconsequential part of philosophy. Even though the ultimate aim of his philosophy, the composition of a Platonic theology, is typical of the Athenian Neoplatonic school, his interest in divine names as sources of philosophical knowledge is not. He shares it with such Platonic philosophers as Plutarch of Chaironeia and Theodorus of Asine, as well as with the Stoics. However, as far as we can tell, Proclus' detailed and systematic examination of the hermeneutics of divine names is unique. The first aspect of this examination concerns the nature of divine names. Proclus argues that there exist different sorts of divine names. On the one hand, there are the divine names that originate from the gods themselves, on the other hand there are man-made divine names. Among the latter group, Proclus distinguishes between the divine names given by inspired poets, those given by those with scientific knowledge of the divine, and finally, those given on the basis of sense-perception and opinion. Since these different types of names differ in quality, it is clearly important for a philosopher to realize that not all divine names are the same, even though Proclus does not tell us exactly how we may recognize the various sorts of divine names.

However, the quality of the lessons learnt from divine names does not just depend on the type of divine name involved. It also depends on the philosophical qualities of the interpreter of the name. The interpretation of a name is determined by the concepts about the gods that the interpreter has. Those who, as for example the Stoics, do not look beyond the material realm will interpret the divine names in accordance with the lowest manifestations of the gods in the material realm. A good Platonist, on the other hand, will interpret the names of the gods in accordance with their true, metaphysical nature. Apparently, a divine name may mean different things to different people.<sup>109</sup> Both interpretations may capture something about the gods, but the latter interpretation will obviously be the better one.

Proclus understands the didactic function that the *Cratylus* ascribes to names in this context. By revealing the metaphysical concept of a divine

---

<sup>109</sup> On this issue, see further Sorabji forthcoming who discusses various Neoplatonic responses to Aristotle's claim in *Int.* 16a that the experiences expressed by names are "the same for all".

name, the teacher urges the student to look beyond the material realm. The student will then discover that he himself harbors the same innate, metaphysical concepts as his master and the name-giver. The student will now move away from the external images of these, i.e. the names, and move to the contemplation of the paradigms of these names.

9. *Taking stock: Proclus' interpretation of the Cratylus in five points*

1. The psychological σκοπός. The ultimate aim of the *Cratylus* is self-knowledge. Our capacity to coin correct names hints at our capacity for knowledge of the Forms, for in order to be able to give correct names we need to know the things, which comes down to knowledge of the Forms (see under 2. below). On closer inspection it turns out that we owe this knowledge, and hence our capacity for giving correct names, to the fact that our own souls consist of innate Forms. Thus, by studying the issue of the correctness of names as discussed in Plato's *Cratylus* we learn an important lesson about our own nature.
2. A Platonic semantic theory. Correct names, since they ought to express the nature of the things to which they refer, are names that are based on knowledge. Since scientific knowledge is possible of stable entities, i.e. of the unchanging the Forms, only, names refer primarily to the Forms. Since successful name-giving requires scientific knowledge, not just anybody can be a name-giver, but only the philosopher. This semantic theory is considered to be at odds with that of Aristotle (and Porphyry). Thus, Socrates' discussion with Hermogenes also entails a refutation of the Aristotelian theory. In those cases in which no scientific knowledge is possible, especially in the case of individuals, names are correct because of convention. That is to say, we may be unable to know the future life of a newly born infant and hence be unable to give it an appropriate name, but τύχη sees to it that the name turns out to be appropriate after all.
3. A theological perspective. The etymologies of the names of the gods in the *Cratylus* are an important part of the dialogue. They are both exegetical and philosophical correct. As a result we may learn something about the gods through their names. What is more, since we are dealing here with Plato's interpretations of Orpheus' theogony, the *Cratylus* plays an important role in Proclus' main philosophical project: to establish the harmony between the ancient revealed



- theologies such as that of Orpheus and Plato's philosophy and more in particular with his *Parmenides* which is a philosophical theogony.
4. A pedagogical perspective. The *Cratylus* aims at the philosophical novice who, like Hermogenes in the dialogue aspires to become a Platonic philosopher. Since one cannot do philosophy without language, and hence names, the dialogue teaches him about these. Like Hermogenes he has to be cured of his orientation towards the material world and *doxa*. Both the discussion between Socrates and Hermogenes and the etymological section work towards this end. The discussion with Hermogenes aims, first, at refuting the erroneous, Aristotelian, views of Hermogenes (and hence those of the aspiring philosopher) about language, next, at demonstrating by means of compelling logical reasoning the correctness of the Platonic position, and, finally, at persuading Hermogenes/the student of the correctness of the Platonic position by means of an appeal to the authority of Homer. In the etymological section, we find that Plato uses the Homeric divine names and myths as a starting point from which he moves to a more philosophical discussion of the gods in an effort to purify our misguided conceptions about them.
  5. The analogy between human name-giver and divine Demiurge. The divine Demiurge, the divine Intellect, also known as Zeus, is the first name-giver. Not only does he create the universe as a material image of the intelligible world of Forms, he also creates the names of these things in the process. The human name-giver resembles him in that he too creates material images (names) of the Forms, be it images of his own innate Forms, not of the transcendental Forms. Or, to put things more precisely, the human name-giver resembles especially the young gods, helpers of the Demiurge, whose task it is to weave together the immaterial formative principles with matter. Naming is thus an *imitatio Dei*, since in naming things on the basis of scientific knowledge we imitate both the divine Demiurge's contemplative and creative activities. By imitating the divine Intellect, then, we work towards fulfillment of our goal in life, to become like god (ὁμοίωσις τῷ θεῷ).

Finally, has Proclus much to offer to the modern students of the *Cratylus*? Less than one might perhaps hope. Proclus was right in stressing the differences between Plato's semantic theory and that of Aristotle, even though Aristotle does not seem to have intended his theory as a deliberate attack on that of his teacher. Moreover, Proclus is right in

that Platonic dialectic requires a Platonic semantic theory. However, as we have seen, he ignores the warning that the *Cratylus* issues against etymology as a method of philosophical investigation. Moreover, Proclus' interpretation is to a large extent the product of his own, deeply religious, Neoplatonism that is as similar to Plato's own philosophy as it is dissimilar, even though Proclus would, of course, be the last to admit it. Even so, the *Commentary* is a highly interesting document regarding the views and uses of language among the Athenian Neoplatonists.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### AFTER PROCLUS

#### 1. *Introduction*

There was Neoplatonic life after Proclus. In this final chapter we shall discuss the influence of Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus* on the last Neoplatonists. On the one hand, we shall find that the Neoplatonists who commented on Aristotle, quite understandably, returned to the thesis that Plato and Aristotle were in harmony. Yet one could not just ignore Proclus' work on the *Cratylus* and simply repeat Porphyry. Proclus' student Ammonius, for example, felt forced to argue for the validity of the thesis that Plato in the *Cratylus* and Aristotle in *De Interpretatione* are in agreement about the nature of names, while pretending that by doing so he was just following Proclus. Whereas his Plato was very Aristotelian, the opposite holds true for Simplicius, who, because of the same harmony thesis, ascribed to Aristotle a linguistic theory that contains many Platonic elements. At the same time, Neoplatonists such as Damascius and Olympiodorus continued to use divine names as a basis of theological study. This theological use of etymology, which only came to an end when the definite collapse of paganism put an end to the interest in this sort of studies, will be the topic of the second part of the present chapter.

#### 2. *Return to the harmony thesis*

##### 2.1 Ammonius on *De Interpretatione* and the *Cratylus*

Ammonius, the son of Hermeias, studied philosophy with Proclus in Athens, and subsequently returned to Alexandria in order to succeed his father Hermeias as the Alexandrian professor of philosophy. Notwithstanding his Athenian education, his taste was rather for Aristotle than for the Platonic theology that Proclus had practiced, as appears from the fact that he lectured mainly, if not exclusively, on Aristotle. Many of these courses were committed to writing either by Ammonius himself or by his pupils. Among these are commentaries on *De*

*Interpretatione* and on the *Categories* to which we shall pay some attention in this chapter. Whether or not this preference for Aristotle was in part motivated by political considerations—Ammonius was after all on the payroll of the Christian municipal authorities that will hardly have liked the idea of funding the study of pagan theology—it made Ammonius adopt a different attitude towards Aristotle from that of Syrianus and Proclus. The latter, it will be remembered, claimed that the philosopher had to approach Aristotle as an impartial judge.<sup>1</sup> Ammonius seems of the same mind when he warns his students not to sell themselves completely and take everything Aristotle says for gospel. If on close inspection it turns out that Aristotle was wrong, so be it.<sup>2</sup> Yet in practice Ammonius appears to return to the Porphyrian tradition of reconciling Plato with Aristotle. Ammonius' comparison of Aristotle's view on the issue whether names are by nature or imposition to that of Plato in his commentary on *De Interpretatione* provides a good illustration in point.

Picking up on Aristotle's definition of an ὄνομα as a "spoken sound significant by convention, without time, none of whose parts is significant in separation" (*Int.* 16a19–21; trans. Ackrill), Ammonius wonders "how, when Socrates in the *Cratylus* argues against Hermogenes' assertion that names are by imposition and shows that they are by nature, Aristotle can insist in these words that no name is by nature?"<sup>3</sup> Ammonius finds the key to this problem in distinguishing between two senses of 'by nature' and 'by imposition'. Ammonius describes the first case of 'by nature' as follows:

**T. 7.1** Some of those who think that they are products of nature, as Cratylus the Heraclitean thought when he said that a fitting name had been assigned by <the agency of> nature to each thing, just as we see that a different perceptual sense is also assigned to different perceptibles. For he said that names resemble the natural, but not the artificial images of visible things, for example, shadows and what usually appears in water or mirrors, that those who say this kind of name are truly 'naming'... and that this is the job of the knowledgeable man, to hunt down the fitting name provided by nature for each thing, just as it is the job of the sharp-sighted man accurately to know the appearance proper to each thing (Ammonius *In Inter.* 34, 22–32; trans. Blank).

<sup>1</sup> See chapter four § 4.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ammonius *In Cat.* 8, 15–19.

<sup>3</sup> Ammonius *In Int.* 34, 17–20.

Both because this passage recalls Proclus' discussion of the four ways in which something can be said to be by nature and because Ammonius had assured his readers in the introduction to his commentary that his *Commentary on De Interpretatione* is basically that of Proclus,<sup>4</sup> scholars generally assume that Ammonius' interpretation of the *Cratylus* coincides with that of Proclus.<sup>5</sup> I doubt this. According to Ammonius, Cratylus holds that nature produces names as some sort of natural images that float around until they are caught by a knowledgeable man who recognizes them to be naturally correct names. Ammonius thus combines Proclus' second and third sense of being 'by nature'. Yet, according to Proclus Cratylus holds that "the proper name of each thing was imposed by first name-givers with skill and knowledge", i.e. Cratylus holds that names are crafted (ἐντέχνως) by knowledgeable humans after the nature of things, not that they are ready-made by nature and only need to be discovered.<sup>6</sup>

Ammonius proceeds by opposing this to another sense in which names may be by nature, i.e. when they fit the nature of things named by them. Ammonius illustrates this by means of the names Ἀρχίδαμος, Ἀγησίλαος, and Βασιλίσκος. These are all by nature names that fit someone with a talent for leadership.<sup>7</sup> The example recalls, of course, the discussion of the names of Hector and Astyanax in the *Cratylus*. People who hold that names are by nature in this way too believe that names are a sort of images, be it this time artificial ones.

Ammonius continues by distinguishing two corresponding senses of "by imposition". On the one hand, there are people like Hermogenes, who assume that names are by imposition in the sense that "it is possible for any man to name any thing with whatever name he likes". Others, on the other hand, when they say that names are by imposition mean:

<sup>4</sup> Ammonius *In Int.* 1, 6–11.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Sheppard 1987; Hadot 1987, 6; Blank 1995: 5–6.

<sup>6</sup> On Proclus' interpretation of the position of Cratylus, see pp. 109–112. It is an interesting question where Ammonius got the idea from that according to some people names resemble natural images, such as reflections in water or mirrors. Certainly not from the *Cratylus*. The *Theaetetus* contains a passage that might have inspired him: "...to express one's thought in verbs and nouns (μετὰ ῥημάτων τε καὶ ὀνομάτων) by means of voice—forming an image of one's belief in the stream that comes from one's mouth, as if in a mirror or a pond. Don't you think that this is a λόγος?" (*Tht.* 206d1–5); on this passage, cf. pp. 143–144.

<sup>7</sup> Ammonius *In Inter.* 35, 1–5.

**T. 7.2** that names are given by the ‘namegiver’ alone, and that he is the one who has knowledge of the nature of things and states a name appropriate to the nature of each existing thing, or else he is the servant of the one who knows, and, learning, from him the substance of each existing thing, is instructed to invent and to impose a fitting and appropriate name for it (Ammonius *In Inter.* 35, 16–21; trans. Blank).

This description refers, of course, to the name-giver from the *Cratylus* who works under the supervision of a dialectician in order to compose names that reflect reality.

Ammonius now argues that this second sense of ‘by imposition’ coincides with the second sense of ‘by nature’. According to him, Aristotle denies that names are ‘by nature’ in the first sense, which he ascribes to Heraclitus. Yet, he would not object to saying that names are ‘by nature’ in the second sense. In support of this claim Ammonius lists passages where Aristotle discusses the etymologies of words as well as passages where Aristotle coins himself words which show that he tried to come up with names that are somehow appropriate for the things which he sets out to name.<sup>8</sup> David Sedley has recently made a similar point by drawing attention to the fact that Aristotle is happy to accept etymologies from the *Cratylus*.<sup>9</sup>

Ammonius may be right that Aristotle at least implicitly assumes that names not just refer to the things of which they are names, but also express, or tend to express these, and that in this respect his views on names do not differ significantly from those of Plato. Yet it should be observed that Proclus would agree with Ammonius only up to a point. Ammonius, like Proclus, holds that Socrates (and hence Plato) does not agree with Hermogenes. Socrates, he writes, shows that names are not

**T. 7.3** ‘by imposition’ in the way that Hermogenes thought (for ‘by nature’ applies to them in the second sense of ‘by nature’, especially to those names by which we indicate the universal and simply the eternal things, since these have a nature which is determinate and intelligible to us...) (Ammonius *In Inter.* 37, 3–7; trans. Blank).

Proclus would, of course, accept that Hermogenes is wrong as well as the idea that we are especially capable of naming eternal things since

<sup>8</sup> Ammonius *In Int.* 37, 14–27. Ammonius mentions, e.g., the etymology of τὸ αὐτόματον (cf. Aristotle *Phys.* II 6, 197b29 f.) and the neologism ἀόριστον ῥῆμα (cf. Aristotle *De Inter.* 16b13).

<sup>9</sup> Sedley 2003: 30–31.

these can be known. The latter is, as we have seen, a recurrent theme in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*. Yet, we have also seen that Proclus systematically and continuously links Hermogenes' view to that of Aristotle and that he is at pains to expose both their views as misguided. Hence, even though we find in Ammonius' brief discussion of the *Cratylus* elements that recall Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, we still have to assume that Ammonius' attempt to harmonize Plato with Aristotle is entirely his own. Moreover, his ill-informed remarks about Cratylus leave one with the impression that he had not studied the *Cratylus* very carefully.

## 2.2 Ammonius on language in his *Commentary on the Categories*

If Ammonius' account of language in his *Commentary on the De Interpretatione* contains Platonic elements such as the idea that naming is not the task of just anyone but of a knowledgeable name-giver or at least one working under the supervision of a knowledgeable person, his account from his *Commentary on the Categories* is decisively Porphyrian-Aristotelian and hence not very Platonic, especially where the object of names is concerned. As Proclus had highlighted in his *Commentary on the Parmenides*, names belong primarily to the intelligible Forms. Their material participants down here are called after these.<sup>10</sup> Porphyry, on the other hand, had argued that language refers primarily to objects in the sensible realm, for these things were the first to be seen and hence the first to be named.

Ammonius appears to follow Porphyry, be it with some modifications. Discussing the old chestnut of the σκοπός of the *Categories*, Ammonius argues, with Porphyry, that the *Categories* deals with significant expressions (περὶ φωνῶν σημαίνουσών), but then, going beyond Porphyry, argues that since these expressions refer to things, be it indirectly through our concepts of these, the *Categories* is also about things (πράγματα) and concepts (νοήματα).<sup>11</sup> This catch-all interpretation will prove influential, as we shall see in the case of Simplicius' interpretation of the *Categories*. What are these things according to Ammonius? In his *Commentary on De Interpretatione*, under the influence of the *Cratylus*, he claimed that especially the names of "the universal and simply the eternal" (T. 7.3) are by nature in the second sense, thus suggesting that he believed

<sup>10</sup> See chapter three § 5.1.

<sup>11</sup> Ammonius *In Cat.* 9, 10–11; on the interpretation of the σκοπός of the *Categories* in later Neoplatonism, cf. Hoffmann 1987.



that language primarily refers to the Forms. Yet, in the *Commentary on the Categories*, he takes the Porphyrian line that the *Categories* are about significant expressions about the sensible universe.<sup>12</sup> Like Porphyry, he assumes that this is because people initially gave names to the things that they perceived by means of sense-perception. Nature, Ammonius tells us, gave mankind speech, since man, being a social animal, needed a means to communicate their thoughts to one another in order to enable him to live in groups:

**T. 7.4** And after they banded together, human beings agreed with one another (συνέθεντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους) that this (τὸδε μὲν), for example, would be named ‘wood’ and that (τὸδε τὸ), ‘stone’; and that the word ‘Socrates’ would signify a certain substance, and ‘walk’ a certain action (Ammonius *In Cat.* 11, 11–14; trans. Cohen & Matthews).

It will be remembered that Proclus had explicitly denied that we first name the concrete individual (the τὸδε).<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, note that there is no mention of a knowledgeable name-giver. Naming happens much as Hermogenes had suggested it in the *Cratylus*, i.e. by means of convention. Thus it appears that there is some tension between Ammonius’ account of language in his *Commentary on the De Interpretatione* and his *Commentary on the Categories*. This may have escaped his notice, but it had caught the eye of his student Simplicius who in his *Commentary on the Categories* tried to read a Platonic view of language into the *Categories*.

### 2.3 Simplicius on language in his *Commentary on the Categories*

Simplicius had been a student of Ammonius at Alexandria and of Damascius, whom he joined in Athens, until in 529 CE the teaching of pagan philosophy was outlawed. After a period of exile in Persia, Simplicius returned within the pale of the Roman Empire. His commentaries on works of Aristotle, including his *Commentary on the Categories*, were composed after this period, somewhere between 523 and 538 CE. It was probably no coincidence that Simplicius ended up with Damascius in Athens. Ammonius, in order not to arouse suspicion, had chosen not to call too much attention to the religious aspect of Neoplatonism, and especially not to the pagan rituals involved. Damascius, on the other

<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g., Ammonius *In Cat.* 33, 24–25: “Aristotle is here discussing things known by perception and to ‘the many’” (trans. Cohen & Matthews).

<sup>13</sup> Chapter three § 5.1.

hand, as the true heir of Proclus, insisted on it.<sup>14</sup> Simplicius, who was imbued with a great sense of pagan spirituality as appears, e.g., from the prayers in his commentaries,<sup>15</sup> must have felt naturally attracted to Damascius' school. What is more, I shall argue that Simplicius' *Commentary on the Categories* bears the marks of Athenian Neoplatonism. These days it is often maintained that there are no major doctrinal differences between the Alexandrian and Athenian Neoplatonists, as was once claimed by K. Praechter.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, there is little evidence for the enormous divide between Athens and Alexandria that Praechter postulated, but I wish to maintain that there are doctrinal differences all the same, due to the religious and mystical attitude of the Athenians and to their interest in Plato that exceeded that of the Alexandrians.

At first sight, Simplicius in the *Commentary on the Categories* seems to follow closely in the footsteps of Ammonius.<sup>17</sup> Like his erstwhile teacher, he is a firm supporter of the harmony thesis. He admonishes his students to take an unbiased attitude to Aristotle. Particularly, they should not convict Plato and Aristotle of discordance by looking only at the letter and not at the spirit of what Aristotle says against Plato, but instead attempt to discover the harmony that exists between them on most issues (ἐν τοῖς πλείστοις συμφωνία).<sup>18</sup> Like Ammonius, he opts for the same kind of catch-all σκόπος of the *Categories*: the *Categories* are about significant expressions and hence also about things and our notions of these.<sup>19</sup> For, Simplicius argues, significant expressions and the nature of things are not wholly separate from each other: names are naturally suited to signify these things (τῶν σημαίνειν αὐτὰ πεφυκότων ὀνομάτων).<sup>20</sup> Neither do thoughts (νοήματα) stand apart from language and reality. Soon, however, Simplicius' account of language starts to deviate from that of Ammonius and to approach that of Proclus. Ammonius' position had been that language refers primarily to the

<sup>14</sup> On Ammonius' and Damascius' different attitudes towards pagan religious practices, see Sorabji 2005.

<sup>15</sup> On this topic, cf., e.g., Hoffmann 1987b: 72–76 on the religious aspects of Simplicius' commentary on Aristotle's *De Caelo*.

<sup>16</sup> See Praechter 1910; D'Ancona 2005 offers an exhaustive account of the scholarly debate about the relation between the Alexandrian and Athenian schools that Praechter initiated together with her own interesting views on the issue.

<sup>17</sup> For an excellent discussion of Simplicius' views about Aristotle's *Categories* and language, see Hoffmann 1987.

<sup>18</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 7, 23–32.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Simplicius *In Cat.* 12, 1–3.

<sup>20</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 12, 13–15.

sensible world and our concepts of it. Not so according to Simplicius, who holds that language refers primarily to our concepts of the metaphysical Forms. Damascius likewise claims that names refer primarily “to intermediate Forms, the objects of discursive reason”, and hence indirectly to the intelligible Forms.<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that elsewhere Simplicius shows himself aware of the fact that this is a Platonic position and that it differs from the Aristotelian position. In *In Phys.* 1249, 12–17 he explains that Aristotle always aims at maintaining the customary meaning of words (τὴν συνήθειαν τῶν ὀνομάτων) and bases his arguments on what is evident to sense-perception. Plato, on the other hand, despises these customary meanings and hurries towards the contemplation of the intelligible. Whereas Proclus had opposed the customary meaning of words to their true meaning which depends on contemplation of the Forms,<sup>22</sup> Simplicius does not consider these as mutual exclusive views, but argues that perfect demonstration consists in a combination of these two.

When we return to the *Commentary on the Categories*, we find that Simplicius continues by explaining that in Intellect, thinking (νοήσις) and the things are the same. “And there is no need of spoken language.”<sup>23</sup> The situation is different in the case of the human soul. The human soul possesses the same things as Intellect does, be it in a secondary way as λόγοι. Because of our fall into the realm of becoming, we forget about these innate ideas. Seeing and hearing stimulate our recollection of them. In the case of hearing, it is the oral teaching of the master that triggers the recollection in the soul of the pupil:

**T. 7.5** The soul needs hearing in order to recollect. For the soul needs someone who has already beheld the truth, who, by means of spoken language (φωνῆς) uttered forth from the concept (ἀπὸ τῆς ἐννοίας προσφερομένης), also moves the concept within [the soul of the student], which had until then grown cold (Simplicius *In Cat.* 12, 26–28; trans. Chase 2003 adapted).

When we compare Simplicius’ views to those of the Alexandrian commentators on Aristotle, we find that, as Ph. Hoffmann points out, Simplicius differs from the latter on at least two different points. First, there is Simplicius’ account of the relation between concepts, things, and

<sup>21</sup> Damascius *In Phd.* I § 346.

<sup>22</sup> See pp. 83–84.

<sup>23</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 12, 18–19.

language.<sup>24</sup> Alexandrine commentators, following Ammonius, remark that the things are derived from the divine, the concepts from intellect, and the vocal sounds from the soul, but they do not explain how these three relate.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, Simplicius attributes another function to language than does Ammonius.<sup>26</sup> For Ammonius, as well as for all the Alexandrine commentators on the *Categories* that followed in his footsteps, language has primarily a social function. Simplicius, on the other hand, presents language as a tool for teaching philosophy in the Platonic sense, i.e. stimulating recollection by means of oral communication. This education has as its aim to make the student aspire to return to the realm of Intellect from which his soul originates:

**T. 7.6** Language is, moreover, the limit of psychic activity, and it pertains to limits to convert things towards their principles. Therefore, language takes those souls which have departed from Intellect and from beings, and have become distinguished from one another, and gathers them together into the unanimity of thought; it makes them adjust to realities, sends them back up to the Intellect, and prepares them not only to wish to be without language, but to wish no longer even to have concepts which are other than realities (Simplicius *In Cat.* 13, 4–9; trans. Chase).

The idea that the study of language, a product of the fallen soul, may ultimately lead us back to Intellect is important to Simplicius, as also appears from the prayer at the end of the commentary in which Simplicius asks that his study may free him from the distractions of life in the material realm and direct him to more noble contemplations.<sup>27</sup>

Very interestingly, Simplicius seems to have doubts about the harmony between Plato and Aristotle in regard to the question whether names are by nature or convention. As we have just seen, he himself is committed to the view from the *Cratylus* that names are naturally suited to signify things. A page later he reports that, according to some people, Aristotle in the *Categories* followed the Pythagorean Archytas in everything, except perhaps on two points. First, Aristotle does not take into consideration the One, and, second, he rejects the natural character of names.<sup>28</sup> Simplicius refers here to a work wrongly ascribed to

<sup>24</sup> Hoffmann 1987: 82–84.

<sup>25</sup> Ammonius *In Inter.* 24, 24–29. This passage is not mentioned by Hoffmann, who refers, e.g., to a similar remark in Olympiodorus *In Cat.* 18, 26–27.

<sup>26</sup> Hoffmann 1987: 81.

<sup>27</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 438, 33–36; cf. Hoffmann 1987: 61–62.

<sup>28</sup> Simplicius *In Cat.* 13, 26: καὶ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀπογινώσκει.

Plato's contemporary Archytas, which contained a version of Aristotle's categories and on whom Aristotle was believed to depend. In fact, this treatise depends on Aristotle. Yet Neoplatonists from Iamblichus onwards took it as an indication of the harmony between Platonism, being considered as a part of the Pythagorean tradition, and Aristotle. While looking for parallels between these two works, the Neoplatonic commentators also noted differences. Simplicius here refers to such a case. Aristotle's *Categories* opens with a discussion of homonymy and synonymy. This discussion, though, is absent from Archytas and the Neoplatonists felt urged to account for this. Dexippus' version is informative here. He suggests that Archytas does not deal with these because homonymy and synonymy are not in accord with Pythagorean principles; "for since they lay down that names are attached to things by nature, they deny all anomaly in language".<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as we have seen in Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, homonymy and synonymy were traditionally regarded as arguments against the Platonic-Pythagorean thesis that names are by nature.<sup>30</sup>

When we compare Simplicius' views on language to those of Proclus, the similarities are striking. Both Simplicius and Proclus hold that names are naturally suited to signify the things they are names of, whether or not Aristotle may think differently about this. These names refer to concepts that originate ultimately from the Forms contained in the divine Intellect. Language is an instrument of philosophical instruction by means of which the teacher who has already seen the truth communicates this by means of moving images, i.e. names, to the student.<sup>31</sup> Language thus weaves a kind of communion between souls.<sup>32</sup> Last but not least there is a mystical element about the study of language: it sets us on the track of divine Intellect, thus bringing about our ascent to the metaphysical realm from which we had fallen away.

<sup>29</sup> Dexippus *In Cat.* 17, 1–3: ἐπεὶ γὰρ φύσει διορίζονται τὰ ὀνόματα κεῖσθαι τοῖς πράγμασι, πᾶσαν τὴν ἀνωμαλίαν τὴν περὶ τὰς λέξεις παραιτοῦνται; trans. Dillon 1990.

<sup>30</sup> Chapter four § 5.

<sup>31</sup> For Proclus, see, e.g., *Theol. Plat.* I 29 p. 124, 9–12: names are external moving images of interior visions of the wise name-givers.

<sup>32</sup> Proclus hints at this in *In Crat.* LI where he explains that names have a double power. On the one hand, they divide being, on the other hand they teach the thoughts of the master and are the cause of communion (p. 20, 19–20: τὴν μὲν διδασκαλικὴν τῶν ἐννοιῶν καὶ κοινωνίας αἰτίαν).

### 3. *Theology from divine names*

#### 3.1 Continuing in Proclus' footsteps: Damascius

Damascius, the last head of the Athenian school, was a philosopher's philosopher: his work is the product of a critical re-examination of Proclus' theological Platonism in which metaphysical speculations are pushed to their extremes. Given his theological interests, which may well have precipitated the closure of the school in 529, his interest in Proclus' method of theologizing from divine names was only to be expected.

Damascius did not do a commentary on the *Cratylus*, but he discussed the issue of divine names in his *Commentary on the Philebus*. As will be remembered, already Proclus in his *Commentary on the Cratylus* had drawn attention to the fact that Socrates in the *Philebus* expresses his deepest reverence for divine names (*Phlb.* 12c).<sup>33</sup> Damascius puts forth three possible explanations for this respect, without committing himself to one of these.

**T. 7.7** Why is there this great reverence of Socrates for the names of the gods?

- Either because long ago the proper names were consecrated to the proper gods and it is wrong to move what should not be moved;
- Or because these are by nature related to them in the manner described in the *Cratylus*;
- Or because they are vocal statues and these are from the gods, as Democritus<sup>34</sup> says. (Damascius *In Phlb.* § 24).

What goes for Proclus' *Commentary on the Cratylus*, also goes for Damascius' *Commentary on the Philebus*: due to the fact that we are dealing here

<sup>33</sup> See pp. 110–112, esp. **T. 4.9**.

<sup>34</sup> Who is this Democritus? Diels-Kranz (68 DK B 142) once suggested that this Democritus is the famous atomist, but this identification is now almost unanimously rejected. The exception to the rule is Hirschle 1979: 63–65 (“Exkurs zu ‘Demokrit’ B142”). He supposes that his name was wrongly inserted here due to an error on the part of the student who recorded Damascius' lectures. This suggestion is hardly attractive. Another candidate is the Middle Platonist Democritus, a contemporary of Longinus, who took a great interest in numerology and the numerical significance of names (cf. Dillon 1985: 211). Finally, since the idea that names are ‘vocal statues’ (ἁγάλματα φωνήεντα) of the gods only becomes current in later Neoplatonism from Hierocles onwards, H. D. Saffrey 1979: 8–9 has suggested that we are dealing here with an otherwise unknown Neoplatonist who was active after Iamblichus (cf. Brisson 1994b: 716–717 *s.v.* ‘Démocrite’). However, lack of evidence does not allow for any firm conclusion.

with notes taken by a student, things are less transparent as one might wish.<sup>35</sup> One wonders, for example, how exactly these three explanations relate. It seems logical to assume that they are all different ones, yet the question is how they differ. The first explanation is sufficiently clear: names have been consecrated (καθιέρωται) to the gods long ago. Apparently to change their names, i.e. to take their old names away, would be something like carrying off old consecrated statues of the gods, a sacrilegious act. The addition of the proverbial expression “moving what should not be moved” (κινεῖν τὰ ἀκίνητα) suggests that much: Marinus *Proclus* § 30, 6f. uses it in connection with the removal of an ancient statue of Athena from the Athenian Acropolis.<sup>36</sup>

The second explanation is that in the *Cratylus* we learn that correct names are by nature (φύσει) in the sense that names are related to their objects (αὐτοῖς ὁκείωται). To change correct names, on this account, means to change something correct into something incorrect. Such changes are evidently to be rejected.

But what to make of the third explanation? As we have seen, Proclus in his *Commentary on the Cratylus* assumes that the theory of correct names from the *Cratylus* implies that divine names are ‘vocal statues’ (ἀγάλματα φωνήεντα).<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the identification of names with statues recalls the first reason: we respect the statues of the gods because they are their property. The addition “and these are from the gods” (καὶ ταῦτά ἐστι τῶν θεῶν) points in this direction. If so, Damascius third reason combines the first two: since the names of the gods resemble them in the manner of the *Cratylus*, they are like statues of the gods and hence the property of the gods. For this reason we have to treat them with the same respect that is due to the gods themselves. This position recalls Proclus’ refutation of Hermogenes’ position.<sup>38</sup>

Damascius does not just follow Proclus’ theory of divine names, he also takes over from him arguments based on etymology. A good example is Damascius’ interpretation of the heaven (οὐρανός) in the myth from the *Phaedrus*. As we have seen, Proclus had backed up his unorthodox interpretation of that heaven as being situated below the

<sup>35</sup> On the vagueness of some notes, cf. Westerink 1959: XII.

<sup>36</sup> On the expression see further Saffrey-Segonds 2001: 165 additional note 1 to p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. chapter five § 3.1. According to Westerink 1982: 15 Damascius means to say that the deity is actually present in its name. This could be, but it would be an unprecedented idea. The parallels which he refers to, are not valid ones.

<sup>38</sup> Chapter four § 7.1.

intelligible world by means of an appeal to the etymology of the name of the god Οὐρανός from the *Cratylus*.<sup>39</sup> Damascius is happy to take over this interpretation of that etymology of the name οὐρανός for the same reason.<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2 Platonic and Christian perspectives: Olympiodorus and Ps.-Dionysius

Olympiodorus, born at some time in between 495 and 505 CE, had been a student of Ammonius and obtained his chair after Ammonius' immediate successor Eutocius. He produced commentaries on both Plato (*Alcibiades*, *Gorgias* and *Phaedo*) and Aristotle (*Categories*, *Metereologica*).<sup>41</sup> By no means the equal to such intellectual giants as Proclus and Damascius, he represents the rather mechanical continuation of the Alexandrian philosophical school. He is one of the last witnesses of the continuing interest in Proclus' theology from divine names. At the same time he alludes to another, Christian, approach towards divine names as a source of theology, such as can be found in Ps.-Dionysius' *On Divine Names*. This gives us the opportunity to say some things, however briefly, about a work that for its title alone deserves being mentioned here.

To start with, Olympiodorus appears to follow Proclus' method of theologizing on the basis of divine names. As we have seen, the etymological section of the *Cratylus* was inspired by attempts to harmonize traditional mythology with contemporary intellectual developments by means of allegory and etymology. Etymologies of divine names from the *Cratylus* were subsequently used over and over again for the same purpose. In the case of Proclus we have discussed at some length the way in which he uses the etymologies from the *Cratylus* to harmonize the kings from Orphic mythology, Phanes, Uranus, Cronus, Zeus, and Dionysus with his own Neoplatonic metaphysics.<sup>42</sup> Olympiodorus takes a leaf from Proclus' book when in his *Commentary on the Phaedo* he

<sup>39</sup> See pp. 184–187 above.

<sup>40</sup> Damascius *Princip.* II p. 91, 24–92, 4 ed. Westerink-Combès; cf. Damascius *In Parm.* III 42, 13–16 for the etymology of Ἥρα (cf. *Crat.* 402b2–4), *In Parm.* III 59, 10–11 for the etymology of Κρόνος (cf. *Crat.* 396b6–7), and *In Parm.* II 78, 1–8 where Damascius attempts to define τὸ ὄν on the basis of an etymology from ἱενάι (cf. *Crat.* 421b7–c2).

<sup>41</sup> On Olympiodorus, see, e.g., Westerink 1990: 329–336.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. chapter six § 5.2.



traces back the Platonic hierarchy of virtues of the soul to Orpheus, who is supposed to have discussed them in a symbolical way.<sup>43</sup> The reign of Uranus represents the contemplative virtues: “Hence the name Οὐρανός, which is derived from τὸ τὰ ἄνω ὁρᾶν (seeing things above).” The purificatory virtues are represented by the reign of Cronus, “who is therefore called Κρόνος, i.e. κορόνους (pure *nous*), because he sees himself.” Olympiodorus does not etymologize the names of Zeus and Dionysus, but he does so in the case of Dionysus’ slayers, the Titans:

**T. 7.8** Or, finally, the soul lives by ethical and physical virtues, symbolized by the reign of Dionysus; hence he is torn to pieces, because these virtues do not imply each other; and the Titans chew his flesh, mastication standing for the extreme division, because Dionysus is the patron of this world, where extreme division prevails because of ‘mine’ and ‘thine’. In the Titans who tear him to pieces, the *ti* (‘something’) denotes the particular, for the universal form is broken up in *genesis*, and Dionysus is the monad of the Titans. When it is said that he is torn by *genesis*, ‘*genesis*’ stands for its causes, just as we call Demeter ‘wheat’ and Dionysus ‘wine’; for, as Proclus [*Hymns*, frg. 1] says:

“What they saw in the children, they expressed in the parents’ names”.  
(Olympiodorus *In Phd.* 1 § 5; trans Westerink).

Olympiodorus’ explanation of what the meaning of the murder of Dionysus is essentially that of Proclus, i.e. it represents the sufferings of the human soul that falls into the realm of *genesis*. What is of particular interest about this passage is Olympiodorus’ remark that the Titans are called after their products, just as happens in the case of Demeter and Dionysus. Proclus had made the same observation in his *Commentary on the Cratylus*, and indeed Olympiodorus refers his readers to Proclus, who had described the same principle in a poetical way in one of his (now lost) hymns.

Olympiodorus’ originality consists in using the method of harmonizing traditional mythology with contemporary thought by means of etymology to make ancient mythology acceptable for his Christian students. Olympiodorus appears from his commentaries as an adept of traditional religion. Yet contrary to Proclus and Damascius, this does not lead him to adopt a very hostile attitude towards the Christians. As L. G. Westerink has pointed out, Olympiodorus did not hesitate to confess to Platonic doctrines that ran counter to Christian dogmas,

<sup>43</sup> Olympiodorus *In Phd.* 1 §§ 4–5; trans. by Westerink 1976.

yet he did not intend to bring things to a head. A good illustration in point is the way in which he suggests that his Christian students may deal with the Greek gods mentioned in traditional and Platonic mythology.<sup>44</sup> Olympiodorus in his *Commentary on the Gorgias* 47 stresses that the Platonists too hold that there is only one God, i.e. one single transcendent cause, from which all things spring, but which itself, because of its transcendence is without name. Being a good Platonist, he denies that this first cause itself is the mediate cause of all things, as the Christians would have it. This first cause produces powers that are superior to us which in turn produce other powers and so forth until our world and we are produced. As examples of these powers, Olympiodorus mentions the powers of Cronus and Zeus. These are, Olympiodorus adds, symbolic names, so his students should not be confused by them,<sup>45</sup> but instead think of the reality for which they stand. On the basis of the well-known etymologies from *Cratylus*, Olympiodorus explains that the power of Cronus is that of pure *Nous* (*In Grg.* 47, 3), and that of Zeus that of Life (*In Grg.* 47, 4). In other words, Olympiodorus, like Proclus before him, uses etymology in order to harmonize traditional mythology with Neoplatonic philosophy. Unlike Proclus, though, he next tries to make ancient mythology acceptable for philosophers, he also tries to make this interpretation of ancient mythology acceptable for the Christians in his audience. This is at least how Westerink interprets the following remark:<sup>46</sup>

**T. 7.9** If you like, you may take it that these powers have no being of their own and no separate existence, but that they are implicit in the First Cause, to which you can ascribe intellectual and vivifying faculties (Olympiodorus *In Grg.* 47, 2; trans. Westerink).

For a Christian it is impossible to accept the existence of divine beings other than the trinity, even if these deities depend for their existence on the first God, as the Neoplatonists claim. By suggesting to consider the lower orders of deities as mere functions or attributes of the one God, Olympiodorus made Neoplatonic theology potentially acceptable for Christians. Note, however, that Olympiodorus himself does not

---

<sup>44</sup> For this passage, see Westerink 1990: 331–333.

<sup>45</sup> Proclus too tells his students that there is no reason to get confused by myths, cf. pp. 188–189.

<sup>46</sup> Westerink 1990: 332.

subscribe to this point of view. This is, in the words of Westerink, “a deliberate invitation to talk at cross-purposes, professor and students each attaching a meaning of their own to the terms used”.

In support of Westerink’s interpretation, we may add that this approach had actually been adopted by contemporary Christian Neoplatonists. The best illustration of this is provided by the mysterious Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite in his work *On the Divine Names*. About Ps.-Dionysius himself we know nothing, yet his works show that he had been heavily influenced by Proclus. This holds also true for *On the Divine Names* which clearly draws some of its inspiration from the *Parmenides* and the Neoplatonic commentaries on that dialogue.<sup>47</sup> The work discusses, as the title indicates, the names by which God is known. In the introduction, Ps.-Dionysius explains that God as such cannot be known and cannot be named.<sup>48</sup> This recalls Proclus’ interpretation of *Parm.* 142a 3–6 according to which of the One there is no name, description, knowledge, sense-perception or opinion. Indeed Ps.-Dionysius refers, tacitly, to this passage from the *Parmenides*.<sup>49</sup> But how about the fact that we find many names of God in the Scriptures? According to Ps.-Dionysius these should be understood as analogies (κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν) which enable the human mind to grasp in this manner what it cannot grasp as such. These are like rays of light, which are rooted in God himself that illuminate everybody in accordance with one’s capacity for illumination. This is not unlike what Proclus says about the fact that we name the One and the most supreme gods in an analogical fashion after things that are inferior to them but that allow us to grasp something about the gods who surpass knowledge and hence naming.<sup>50</sup>

The relation between the Neoplatonic interpretation of the *Parmenides* and Ps.-Dionysius goes even further. Among the names that Ps.-Dionysius attributes to God, are rather unbiblical names such as ‘greatness’ and ‘smallness’, ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, ‘likeness’ and ‘unlikeness’, ‘rest’, ‘motion’ and ‘equality’ (IX). They originate from the *Parmenides* (even though Ps.-Dionysius tries to trace these names back to the Bible).<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> On the relation between *On Divine Names* and the Neoplatonic interpretations of the *Parmenides*, see, e.g., Corsini 1962.

<sup>48</sup> Ps.-Dionysius *On Divine Names* I.1.

<sup>49</sup> For Proclus’ interpretation of this passage from the *Parmenides*, see pp. 163–164. Ps.-Dionysius refers to this passage in *On Divine Names* I. 5–6, cf. Corsini 1962: 104.

<sup>50</sup> See the discussion on p. 166.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Corsini 1962: 92–98 on the *Parmenides* as the source of these names.

As we have seen, Proclus had interpreted the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* as Plato's own theogony and the qualities discussed in it such as sameness et cetera as Platonic counterparts to the divine names from Greek mythology. Like Proclus, Ps.-Dionysius connects Plato's *Parmenides* to his Holy Scripture, be it, in this case, the Bible and not Hesiod's theogony. However, unlike Proclus, Ps.-Dionysius does not explicitly refer to the *Parmenides*. Moreover, he does not regard the qualities from the *Parmenides* as names of divine entities other than the supreme god, but as attributes of a unique God, just as Olympiodorus had suggested that his Christian students might do.

This little discussion may suffice to give an impression of the extent of Proclus' influence on Ps.-Dionysius' theory of divine names. It is especially Proclus' interpretation of the *Parmenides* that informs his discussion, not that of the *Cratylus*. And quite understandably so, for the names of the Greek gods, which were at the heart of Proclus' theology from names, were of no interest to the Christian Ps.-Dionysius. And so, with the disappearance of pagan gods disappeared the need to make them philosophically acceptable. In the process, the *Cratylus* as an instrument for turning mythology into philosophy lost its purpose.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### *Editions Cited of the Principal Texts*

#### ANONYMOUS

Westerink, L. G. & Trouillard, J. & Segonds, A. Ph. (1990), *Prolégomènes à la philosophie de Platon* (Paris).

#### ALCINOUS

Whittaker, J. & Louis, P. (1990), *Alcinoos. Enseignement des doctrines de Platon* (Paris).

#### ARISTOTLE

Minio-Paluello, L. (1949), *Aristotelis Categoriae et Liber De Interpretatione* (Oxford).

Rashed, M. (2005), *Aristote. De la génération et la corruption* (Paris).

Ross, W. D. (1956), *De Anima* (Oxford).

Ross, W. D. (1964), *Aristotelis Analytica Priora et Posteriora* (Oxford).

Ross, W. D. (1959), *Ars Rhetorica* (Oxford).

#### CHALDAEAN ORACLES

Des Places, É. (1996<sup>3</sup>), *Oracles Chaldaïques avec un choix de commentaires anciens* (Paris).

#### CICERO

Reid, J. S. (1885), *M. Tulli Ciceronis Academica* (London).

#### CORNUTUS

Lang, C. (1881), *Cornuti Theologiae Graecae Compendium* (Leipzig).

#### DAMASCIUS

Westerink, L. G. (1977), *The Greek Commentators on Plato's Phaedo II: Damascius* (Amsterdam).

— (1982<sup>2</sup>), *Damascius: Lectures on the Philebus wrongly attributed to Olympiodorus. Text, Translation, Notes and Indices* (Amsterdam).

— & Combès, J. (1986–1991), *Damascius: Traité des premiers principes*, 3 volumes (Paris).

— & Combès, J. & Segonds, A.-Ph. (1997–2003), *Damascius: Commentaire du Parménide de Platon*, 4 volumes (Paris).

#### HIEROCLES

Koehler, F. G. (1974), *Hieroclis In aureum Pythagoreorum carmen commentarius* (Leipzig).

#### IAMBlichUS

Des Places, É. (1989<sup>2</sup>), *Jamblique: Les Mystères d'Égypte* (Paris).

Dillon, J. M. (1973), *Iamblichi Chalcidensis In Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta* (Leiden).

#### MARINUS

Saffrey, H. D. & Segonds, A.-Ph. (2001), *Proclus ou Sur le Bonheur* (Paris).

#### OLYMPIODORUS

Westerink, L. G. (1976), *The Greek Commentators on Plato's Phaedo I: Olympiodorus* (Amsterdam).

## PHILO

- Colson, F. H. & Whitaker, G. H. (1929), *Philo*, volume 1 (London-New York).  
 Marcus, R. (1953), *Philo. Questions and Answers on Genesis* (Cambridge, Massachusetts).

## PLATO

- Burnet, I. (1901–1907), *Platonis Opera* I–V (Oxford).  
 Duke, E. A. *et al.* (1995), *Platonis Opera* I (Oxford).  
 Slings, S. R. (2003), *Platonis Rempublicam* (Oxford).

## PLOTINUS

- Henry, P. & Schwyzer, H.-R. (1964–1982), *Plotini Opera*, 3 volumes (Oxford).

## PLUTARCH

- Griffiths, J. G. (1970), *Plutarch's De Iside et Osiride. Edited with an Introduction, Translation and Commentary* (Cambridge).

## PORPHYRY

- Busse, A. (1887), *Porphyrii Isagoge et in Aristotelis categorias commentarium* (Berlin).  
 Heath, M. (2002), 'Porphyry's Rhetoric: Texts and Translations', *Leeds International Classical Studies* 1, 5 (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/lics/>).  
 Smith, A. (1993), *Porphyrii Philosophi Fragmenta* (Stuttgart).

## PROCLUS

- Cousin, V. (1864<sup>2</sup>), *Procli Philosophi Platonici opera inedita* (Paris) 603–1314 (*In Parmenidem* I–VI).  
 Friedlein, G. (1873), *Procli Diadochi in primum Euclidis elementorum librum commentarii* (Leipzig).  
 Kroll, W. (1899–1901), *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Rem publicam commentarii*, 2 volumes (Leipzig).  
 Pasquali, G. (1908), *Procli Diadochi in Platonis Cratylum commentaria* (Leipzig).  
 Saffrey, H. D. & Westerink, L. G. (1968–1997), *Proclus: Théologie platonicienne*, 6 volumes (Paris).  
 Segonds, A. Ph. (1986), *Proclus: Sur le premier Alcibiade de Platon*, 2 volumes (Paris).  
 Steel, C. (1985), *Proclus Commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon* (vol. II) (Leuven) (*In Parmenidem* VII).

## SIMPLICIUS

- Kalbfleisch, K. (1907), *Simplicii In Aristotelis Categorias commentarium* (Berlin).

*Secondary Literature*

- Abbate, M. (2001), *Dall'etimologia alla teologia: Proclo interprete del Cratilo* (Piemme).  
 Ackrill, J. L. (1963), *Aristotle: Categories and De Interpretatione. Translated with Notes and Glossary* (Oxford).  
 — (1994), 'Language and Reality in Plato's Cratylus', in: A. Alberti (ed.), *Studi di filosofia antica: realtà e ragione* (Florence) 9–28.  
 Ademollo, F. (2003), 'Democritus B26, on Names', in: Ch. Nifadopoulos (ed.), *Etymology: Studies in Ancient Etymology. Proceedings of the Cambridge Conference on Ancient Etymology 25–27 September 2000* (Münster) 33–42.  
 Algra, K. (2003), 'Stoic Theology', in: B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics* (Cambridge) 153–178.  
 — (2004), 'Eternity and the Concept of God in Early Stoicism', in: G. Van Riel & C. Macé (eds.) 2004: 173–190.

- Allen, J. (2005), 'The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology', in: D. Frede & B. Inwood (eds.) 2005: 14–35.
- Allen, W. S. (1949), 'Ancient Ideas on the Origin and Development of Language', *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1948: 35–60.
- Alvarez Hoz, J. M. & Gabilondo Pujol, A. & García Ruiz, J. M. (1999), *Proclo: Lecturas del 'Cratilo' de Platón* (Madrid).
- Atherton, C. (2005), 'Lucretius on what Language is not', in: D. Frede & B. Inwood (eds.) 2005: 101–138.
- Atkinson, M. J. (1983), *Plotinus: Ennead V. 1 on the Three Principal Hypostases. A Commentary with Translation* (Oxford).
- Aubenque, P. (1985), 'Plotin et Dexippe, exégètes des catégories d'Aristote', in: Ch. Rutten & A. Motte (eds.), *Aristoteleica: Mélanges offerts à Marcel de Corte*, (Brussels) 7–40.
- Babbitt, F. C. (1936), *Plutarch's Moralia* (vol. 5) (Cambridge, Massachusetts).
- Barnes, J. (1989), 'Antiochus of Ascalon', in: M. Griffin and J. Barnes (eds.), *Philosophia Togata. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society* (Oxford) 51–96.
- (2003), 'Proofs and Syllogisms in Galen', in J. Barnes & J. Jouanna (eds.) 2003: 1–29.
- & Jouanna, J. (eds.) (2003), *Galien et la philosophie*, Genève.
- Barney, R. (1997), 'Plato on Conventionalism', *Phronesis* 42: 143–162.
- (1998), 'Socrates Agonistes: The Case of the *Cratylus* Etymologies', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 16: 63–98.
- (2001), *Names and Nature in Plato's Cratylus* (New York & London).
- Barwick, K. (1957), *Probleme der stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*. Abhandlungen der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Philologisch-historische Klasse 49, 3 (Berlin).
- Baxter, T. M. S. (1992), *The Cratylus: Plato's Critique of Naming* (Leiden).
- Bidez, J. (1913), *Vie de Porphyre, le philosophe Néo-platonicien* (Gand).
- Blank, D. (1996), *Ammونیus: On Aristotle On interpretation* 1–8 (London).
- (1998), *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Grammarians (adversus Mathematicos I)* (Oxford).
- Blumenthal, H. J. (1997), 'Iamblichus as a Commentator', in: H. J. Blumenthal & F. F. Finamore (eds.) 1997: 1–13.
- & Finamore, F. F. (eds.) (1997), *Iamblichus: the Philosopher (= Syllecta Classica 8)*.
- Boyancé, P. (1975), 'Étymologie et théologie chez Varron', *Revue des Études Latines* 53: 99–115.
- Boys-Stones, G. R. (2001), *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study of its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford).
- Brisson, L. (1987), 'Proclus et l'Orphisme', in: J. Pépin & H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987: 43–103.
- (1994a), *Platon, les mots et les mythes: Comment et pourquoi Platon nomma le myth?* (Paris).
- (1994b), 'Démocritos', in: R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques II (Babélyca d'Argos à Dyscolius)* (Paris) 716–717.
- (2002a), 'La figure du Kronos orphique chez Proclus. De l'orphisme au néoplatonisme, sur l'orgine de l'être humain', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 219, 4 (*L'orphisme et ses écritures. Nouvelles recherches*) 435–458.
- (2002b), 'Orphée, Pythagore et Platon. Le mythe qui établit cette ligne', in: Th. Kobush & M. Erler (eds.), *Metaphysik und Religion: Zur Signatur des spätantiken Denkens*. Akten des Internationalen Kongresses vom 13.–17. März 2001 in Würzburg (München-Leipzig) 415–427.
- (2003), 'Plato's *Timaeus* and the *Chaldaean Oracles*', in: G. J. Reydam-Schils (ed.), *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon* (Notre Dame) 111–132.
- (2004), 'Kronos, Summit of the Intellective Hebdomad in Proclus' Interpretation of the *Chaldaean Oracles*', in G. van Riel & C. Macé (eds.) 2004: 191–210.
- Brittain, Ch. (2005), 'Common Sense: Concepts, Definition and Meaning in and out of the Stoa', in: D. Frede & B. Inwood (eds.) 2005: 164–209.



- Burkert, W. (1985), 'Herodot über die Namen der Götter: Polytheismus als historisches Problem', *Museum Helveticum* 42: 121–132.
- Charles, D. (1994), 'Aristotle on Names and Their Signification', in: S. Everson (ed.) 1994: 37–73.
- (2000), *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence* (Oxford).
- Chase, M. (2003), *Simplicius on Aristotle's "Categories 1–4"* (London).
- Chiaradonna, R. (2002), *Sostanza movimento analogia: Plotino critico di Aristotele* (Napoli).
- (2003), 'Il tempo misura del movimento? Plotino e Aristotele (*Enn.* III [45])', in: M. Bonazzi and F. Trabattori (eds.), *Platone e la tradizione Platonica: Studi di filosofia antica* (Milano) 221–250.
- (2004), 'Plotino e la teoria degli universali *Enn.* VI 3 [44], 9', in: V. Celluprica & C. D'Ancona (eds.), *Aristotele e i suoi esegeti neoplatonici: Logica e ontologia nelle interpretazioni greche e arabe*. Atti del convegno internazionale Roma, 19–20 ottobre 2001 (Napoli) 3–35.
- (2005), 'Plotino e la corrente antiaristotelica del platonismo imperiale. Analogie e differenze', in: M. Bonazzi & V. Celluprica (eds.), *L'Eredità Platonica: Studi sul Platonismo da Arcesilao a Proclo* (Napoli) 235–274.
- forthcoming, 'Concetti generali, astrazioni e forme in Porfirio', in: Ch. Erismann (ed.), *De la logique à l'ontologie. Études sur la philosophie de Porphyre et son influence durant l'Antiquité et le haut Moyen Âge*.
- Cleary, J. J. (ed.) (1997), *The Perennial Tradition of Neoplatonism* (Leuven).
- (ed.) (1999), *Traditions of Platonism: Essays in Honour of John Dillon* (Aldershot).
- Cohen, M. S. & Matthews, G. B. (1991), *Ammonius On Aristotle's Categories* (London).
- Cooper, J. M. (1997) (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis).
- Corsini, E. (1962), *Il trattato "De Divinis nominibus" dello Pseudo-Dionigi e i commenti neoplatonici al Parmenide* (Turin).
- Courcelle, P. (1948), *Les lettres grecques en occident de Macrobe à Cassiodore* (Paris).
- Dalimier, C. (1998), *Cratyle* (Paris).
- (2000), 'Les enjeux de la reformulation syllogistique chez les commentateurs grecs du *De caelo* d'Aristote', in: M.-O. Goulet-Cazé & T. Dorandi (eds.) 2000: 377–386.
- Dalsgaard Larsen, B. (1972), *Jamblique de Chalcis: Exégète et Philosophe*, 2 volumes (Aarhus).
- D'Ancona, C. (2000), 'Syrianus dans la tradition exégétique de la *Métaphysique* d'Aristote', in: M.-O. Goulet-Cazé & T. Dorandi (eds.) 2000: 311–327.
- (2005), 'Il neoplatonismo alessandrino: alcune linee della ricerca contemporanea', *Adamantius* 11: 9–38.
- De Haas, F. A. J. (2001), 'Did Plotinus and Porphyry Disagree on Aristotle's *"Categories"*?', *Phronesis* 46: 492–526.
- De Rijk, L. M. (2002), *Aristotle's Semantics and Ontology. Volume 1: General Introduction. The Works on Logic* (Leiden).
- Deuse, W. (1973), *Theodoros von Asine. Sammlung der Testimonien und Kommentar* (Wiesbaden).
- D'Hoine, P. (2004), 'Four Problems Concerning the Theory of Ideas: Proclus, Syrianus and the Ancient Commentaries on the *Parmenides*', in: G. van Riel & C. Macé (eds.) 2004: 9–29.
- Dillon, J. M. (1977), *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London).
- (1978), 'Philo Judaeus and the *Cratylus*', *Liverpool Classical Monthly* 3: 37–42.
- (1985), 'The Magical Power of Names in Origen and later Platonism', in: R. Hanson & H. Cronzel (eds.), *Origeniana Tertia. The Third International Colloquium for Origen Studies* (University of Manchester September 7th–11th, 1981) (Rome) 203–216.
- & Long, A. A. (eds.) (1988), *The Question of "Eclecticism": Studies in Later Greek Philosophy* (Berkeley).
- (1990), *Dexippus on Aristotle Categories* (London).
- (1993), *Alcinous: The Handbook of Platonism. Translated with an Introduction and a Commentary* (Oxford).

- (1995), 'The Neoplatonic Exegesis of the *Statesman* Myth', in: C. J. Rowe (ed.), *Reading the Statesman. Proceedings of the III Symposium Platonicum* (Sankt Augustin) 364–374.
- (1997), 'Iamblichus' Νοερά Θεωρία of Aristotle's *Categories*', in: H. J. Blumenthal & F. F. Finamore (eds.) 1997: 65–77.
- (2003), *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy (347–274 BC)* (Oxford).
- Donini, P. (1988), 'The History of the Concept of Eclecticism', in: J. M. Dillon & A. A. Long (eds.) 1988: 15–33.
- Döring, K. (1972), *Die Megariker. Kommentierte Sammlung der Testimonien* (Amsterdam).
- Dörrie H. & Baltes, M. (1993), *Der Platonismus in der Antike. Band 3* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt).
- Duvick, B. (2007), *Proclus: On Plato Cratylus* (London).
- Everson, S. (1994) (ed.), *Companions to Ancient Thought 3: Language* (Cambridge).
- Fehling, D. (1965), 'Zwei Untersuchungen zur griechischen Sprachphilosophie', *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* n.s. 108: 212–229.
- Ferwerda, R. (1982), 'Plotinus on Sounds: An Interpretation of Plotinus' *Enneads* V, 5, 5, 19–27', *Dionysius* 6: 43–57.
- Festugière, A.-J. (1963), 'Modes des compositions des commentaires de Proclus', *Museum Helveticum* 20: 77–100.
- (1967), *Proclus: Commentaire sur le Timée*, volume 2 (Paris).
- (1969), 'L'ordre de lecture des dialogues de Platon aux V<sup>e</sup>–VI<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Museum Helveticum* 26: 281–296.
- Frede, D. & Inwood, B. (eds.) (2005), *Language and Learning: Philosophy of Language in the Hellenistic Age: Proceedings of the Ninth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Oxford).
- Froidefond, Ch. (1988), *Plutarque Oeuvres morales*, vol. 5 (Paris).
- Gaskin, R. (2000), *Simplicius on Aristotle's Categories 9–15* (London).
- Gersh, S. (1978), *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden).
- (2003), 'Proclus' *Commentary on the Timaeus*: The Prefatory Material', in: R. W. Sharples & A. Sheppard (eds.) 2003: 143–153.
- Görler, W. (2004), 'Antiochus von Askalon über die 'Alten' und über die Stoa: Beobachtungen zu Cicero, *Academici posteriores* I 24–43', in: Ch. Catrein (ed.), *Kleine Schriften zur hellenistisch-römischen Philosophie von Woldemar Görler* (Leiden) 87–104.
- Goulet-Cazé, M.-O. & Dorandi, T. (eds.) (2000), *Le commentaire entre tradition et innovation. Actes du colloque international de l'Institut des traditions textuelles* (Paris et Villejuif, 22–25 septembre 1999) (Paris).
- Grote, G. (1865), *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, 3 volumes (London).
- (1978), *A History of Greek Philosophy V: The Later Plato and the Academy* (Cambridge).
- Hadot, I. & Hadot, P. (2004), *Apprendre à philosopher dans l'Antiquité: L'enseignement du "Manuel d'Épictète" et son commentaire néoplatonicien* (Paris).
- Hadot, P. (1981), 'Ouranos, Kronos and Zeus in Plotinus' Treatise Against the Gnostics', in: H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus (eds.), *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought: Essays in Honour of A. H. Armstrong* (London) 124–137.
- (1990), 'The Harmony of Plotinus and Aristotle according to Porphyry', in: R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990: 125–140.
- Hankinson, R. J. (1994), 'Usage and Abuse: Galen on Language', in: Everson (ed.) 1994: 166–187.
- Heiser, J. H. (1991), *Logos and Language in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Lewiston).
- Helmbold, W. C. & O'Neil, E. (1959), *Plutarch's Quotations*. Philological Monographs XIX (Baltimore).
- Herbermann, C.-P. (1996), 'Antike Etymologie', in: P. Schmitter (ed.), *Geschichte der Sprachtheorie II: Sprachtheorien der abendländischen Antike* (Tübingen) 353–376.
- Hirschle, M. (1979), *Sprachphilosophie und Namenmagie im Neuplatonismus. Mit einem Exkurs zu 'Demokrit' B142* (Meisenheim am Glan).

- Hoffmann, Ph. (1987), 'Catégories et langage selon Simplicius-La question du «skopos» du traité aristotélicien des «Catégories»', in: I. Hadot (ed.), *Simplicius: sa vie, son œuvre, sa survie*. Actes du colloque international de Paris (28 Sept.–1er Oct.) (Berlin-New York) 61–90.
- (1987b), 'Simplicius' Polemics. Some Aspects of Simplicius' Polemical Writings against John Philoponus: From Invective to a Reaffirmation of the Transcendence of the Heavens', in: R. Sorabji (ed.), *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (London) 57–83.
- Jackson, R. & Lycos, K. & Tarrant, H. (1998), *Olympiodorus Commentary on Plato's 'Gorgias'* (Leiden).
- Janko, R. (1992), *The Illias: A Commentary. Volume IV: Book 13–16* (Cambridge).
- (2001), 'The Derveni Papyrus (Diagoras of Melos, *Apopyrgizontes logoi?*): A New Translation', *Classical Philology* 96: 1–32.
- Kahn, Ch. H. (1996), *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (Cambridge).
- (1997), 'Was Euthyphro the Author of the Derveni Papyrus?', in: A. Laks & G. W. Most (eds.), *Studies on the Derveni Papyrus* (Oxford) 55–63.
- (2001), *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Indianapolis).
- Karamanolis, G. E. (2006), *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford).
- Kotzia-Panteli, P. (2000), 'ENNOHMATIKOS und OΥΣΙΩΔΗΣ ΛΟΓΟΣ als exegetisches Begriffspaar', *Philologus* 144: 45–61.
- Kretzmann, N. (1971), 'Plato on the Correctness of Names', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 8: 126–138.
- Lamberton, R. (1986), *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley).
- Lamberz, E. (1987), 'Proklos und die Form des philosophischen Kommentars', in: J. Pépin & H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987: 1–20.
- Lewy, H. (1978?), *Chaldaean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism, Magic and Platonism in the later Roman Empire* (Paris).
- Lloyd, A. C. (1990), *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford).
- Long, A. A. & Sedley, D. N. (1987), *The Hellenistic Philosophers* (2 volumes) (Cambridge).
- Long, A. A. (1996), 'Stoic readings of Homer', in: A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge) 58–84.
- (1997), 'Allegory in Philo and Etymology in Stoicism: A Plea for Drawing Distinctions', *The Studia Philonica Annual* 9: 198–210.
- (2002), 'Stoic Reactions to Plato's *Cratylus*', in: M. Canto-Sperber & P. Pellegrin (eds.), *Le Style de la pensée. Recueil de textes en hommage à Jacques Brunschwig* (Paris) 395–411.
- (2005), 'Stoic Linguistics, Plato's *Cratylus*, and Augustine's *De dialectica*', in: D. Frede & B. Inwood (eds.) 2005: 36–55.
- Luna, C. (1990), 'Une notion néopythagorienne d'homonymie chez Simplicius? A propos d'un article de M. Narcy', in: I. Hadot (ed.), *Simplicius. Commentaire sur les Catégories*. Traduction commentée (Fascicule III) (Leiden) 147–152.
- Majercik, R. (1989), *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden).
- Manetti, D. (2003), 'Galeno, la lingua di Ippocrate et il tempo', in: J. Barnes & J. Jouanna (eds.) 2003: 171–228.
- Mansfeld, J. (1994), *Prolegomena: Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text* (Leiden).
- (2003), review of Boys-Stones (2001) in: *Mnemosyne* 56: 631–634.
- Modrak, D. K. W. (2001), *Aristotle's Theory of Language and Meaning* (Cambridge).
- Montanari, E. (1988), *Le sezione linguistica del Peri hermeneias di Aristotele* (vol. II): *Il commento* (Firenze).

- Morrow, G. R. (1970), *Proclus: A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements* (Princeton).
- & Dillon, J. M. (1978), *Proclus' Commentary on Plato's Parmenides* (Princeton).
- Most, G. W. (1989), 'Cornutus and Stoic Allegoresis: A Preliminary Report', in: W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 36, 3 (Berlin–New York) 2029–2034.
- Mueller, I. (1990), 'Aristotle's Doctrine of Abstraction in the Commentators', in: R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990: 463–480.
- Muller, R. (1994), 'Diodorus, dit Cronos', in: R. Goulet (ed.), *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques vol. II* (Paris) 779–781.
- O'Meara, D. J. (1999), 'Forms of individuals in Plotinus: A Preface to the Question', in: J. J. Cleary (ed.) 1999: 264–269.
- (2003), *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford).
- O'Neill, W. (1971<sup>2</sup>), *Proclus: Alcibiades I. A Translation and Commentary* (The Hague).
- Opsomer, J. (2003), 'La démiurgie des jeunes dieux selon Proclus', *Les Études Classiques* 71: 5–49.
- & Steel, C. (2003), *Proclus: On the Existence of Evils* (London).
- (2004), 'Syrianus on Homonymy and Forms', in: G. van Riel & C. Macé (eds.) 2004: 31–50.
- Pasquali, G. (1906), 'Prolegomena ad Procli Commentarium in Cratylum', *Studi Italiani di Filologia Classica* 14: 127–152.
- Pépin, J. (1970), 'Plotin et le miroir de Dionysos (*Enn.* IV, 3 [27], 12, 1–2)', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 92: 304–320.
- & Saffrey, H. D. (eds.) (1987), *Proclus: Lecteur et interprète des anciens*. Actes du colloque international du CNRS Paris (2–4 octobre 1985) (Paris).
- Peraki-Kyriakidou, H. (2002), 'Aspects of Ancient Etymologizing', *Classical Quarterly* 52: 478–493.
- Pinchard, A. (2003), 'La langue des dieux, de Platon à Proclus', in: J. Laurent (ed.), *Les dieux de Platon*. Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie les 24, 25 et 26 janvier 2002 (Caen) 213–250.
- Polansky, R. & Kuczewski, M. (1990), 'Speech and Thought, Symbol and Likeness: Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 16a3–9', *Apeiron* 23: 51–63.
- Politis, V. (2004), *Aristotle and the Metaphysics* (London).
- Putnam, H. (1975), *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers, Volume 2* (Cambridge).
- Rappe, S. (2000), *Reading Neoplatonism. Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius* (Cambridge).
- Reeve, C. D. C. (1998), *Plato Cratylus* (Indianapolis).
- Ritoré Ponce, J. (1992a), *La Teoría del Nombre en el Neoplatonismo Tardío* (Cadiz).
- (1992b), 'La refutación de Hermógenes en el Cratilo a la luz de los escolios de Proclo', *Habis* 23: 263–270.
- Romano, F. (1987), 'Proclo lettore e interprete del *Cratilo*', in: J. Pépin & H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987: 113–136.
- (1989), *Proclo: Lezioni sul "Cratilo" di Platone. Introduzione, Traduzione e Commenti* (Catanina).
- Ross, W. D. (1936), *Aristotle's Physics: A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford).
- Rowe, C. J. (1997), 'Statesman', in: Cooper (ed.) 1997: 294–358.
- Ruch, M. (1970), *Cicero Academica posteriora. Liber primus—Cicéron. Secondes Académiques, livre I. Edition, introductions et commentaire* (Paris).
- Runia, D. T. (1986), *Philo of Alexandria and the Timaeus of Plato* (Leiden).
- Saffrey, H. D. (1979), 'Nouveaux liens objectif entre le pseudo-Denys et Proclus', *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 63: 3–16.
- (1990), 'How did Syrianus regard Aristotle?', in: R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990: 173–179

- (English translation of: H. D. Saffrey, 'Comment Syrianus, le maître de l'école néoplatonicienne d'Athènes, considèrait-il Aristote?', in: J. Wiesner (1987) (ed.), *Aristoteles: Werk und Wirkung. Paul Moraux gewidmet*, vol. 2 (Berlin) 205–214).
- (1992), 'Accorder entre elles les traditions théologiques: une caractéristique du Néoplatonisme Athénien', in: E. P. Bos and P. A. Meijer (eds.), *On Proclus and his Influence in Medieval Philosophy* (Leiden) 35–50.
- Schibli, H. S. (2002), *Hierocles of Alexandria* (Oxford).
- Schofield, M. (1972), 'A Displacement in the Text of the *Cratylus*', *Classical Quarterly* 22: 246–253.
- Searle, J. R. (1969), *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge).
- Sedley, D. (1998), 'The Etymologies in Plato's *Cratylus*', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 118: 140–154.
- (2000), 'The ideal of godlikeness', in: G. Fine (ed.), *Oxford Readings in Philosophy: Plato* (Oxford) 791–810.
- (2003), *Plato's Cratylus* (Cambridge).
- Segonds, A. Ph. & Steel, C. (eds.) (2000), *Proclus et la Théologie Platonicienne*. Actes du Colloque International de Louvain (13–16 mai 1998) en l'honneur de H. D. Saffrey et L. G. Westerink (Leuven-Paris).
- Sharples, R. W. & Sheppard, A. (eds.) (2003), *Ancient Approaches to Plato's Timaeus*. BICS Supplement 78 (London).
- Sheppard, A. D. R. (1980), *Studies on the 5th and 6th Essays of Proclus' Commentary on the Republic* (Göttingen).
- (1987), 'Proclus' Philosophical Method of Exegesis: The Use of Aristotle and the Stoics in the *Commentary on the Cratylus*', in: J. Pépin and H. D. Saffrey (eds.) 1987: 137–151.
- Sluiter, I. (1990), *Ancient Grammar in Context. Contributions to the Study of Ancient Linguistic Thought* (Amsterdam).
- (1995), 'The embarrassment of imperfection: Galen's assessment of Hipocrates' linguistic merits', in: H. F. J. Horstmanshoff & P. H. Schrijvers & Ph. J. van der Eijk (eds.), *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context*. Papers Read at the Congress held at Leiden University 13–15 April 1992, volume 2 (Amsterdam) 519–535.
- (1997), 'The Greek Tradition', in: W. van Bakkum et al. (eds.), *The Emergence of Semantics in Four Linguistic Traditions: Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Arabic* (Amsterdam) 149–224.
- Smith, A. (1987), 'Porphyrian Studies since 1913', in: W. Haase (ed.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 36, 2: 717–773.
- (2000), 'Porphyry and the Platonic Theology', in: A. Ph. Segonds & C. Steel (eds.) 2000: 177–188.
- (2005) (ed.), *The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity. Essays in Honour of Peter Brown* (Swansea).
- Sorabji, R. (1990) (ed.), *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence* (London).
- (2004), *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Volume 1: Psychology* (London).
- (2004), *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD: A Sourcebook. Volume 3: Logic and Metaphysics* (London).
- (2005), 'Divine Names and Sordid Deals in Ammonius' Alexandria', in: Smith (ed.) 2005: 203–213.
- (forthcoming), 'Meaning: Ancient Comments on Five Lines of Aristotle', in: Ch. Shields (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook on Aristotle* (Oxford).
- Steel, C. (1997a), 'Breathing Thought: Proclus on the Innate Knowledge of the Soul', in: J. J. Cleary (ed.) 1997: 293–309.
- (1997b), 'Proclus et l'interprétation 'logique' du *Parménide*', in: L. G. Benakis (ed.), *Néoplatonisme et philosophie médiévale*. Actes du Colloque international de Corfu 6–8 octobre 1995 (Rencontres de philosophie médiévale 6) (Turnhout) 67–92.

- & Rumbach, F. (1997), 'The Final Section of Proclus' *Commentary on the Parmenides*: A Greek Retroversion of the Latin Translation (with an English Translation by D. Gregory McIsaac)', *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8: 210–267.
- (2000), 'Le *Parménide* est-il le fondement de la *Théologie Platonicienne*?', in: A. Ph. Segonds & C. Steel (eds.) 2000: 373–397.
- (2002), 'Neoplatonic versus Stoic Causality: The Case of the Sustaining Cause (*sunektikon*)', in: C. Esposito and P. Porro (eds.), *Quaestio 2: Causality* (Turnhout) 77–93.
- (2003a), 'Définitions et idées: Aristote, Proclus et le Socrate du *Parménide*', in: A. Motte & Chr. Rutte & P. Somville (eds.), *Philosophie de la Forme: Eidos, idea, morphè dans la philosophie grecque des origines à Aristote*. Actes du colloque interuniversitaire de Liège 29 et 30 mars 2001 (Aristote: Traductions et études) (Louvain) 593–609.
- (2003b), 'Why Should We Prefer Plato's *Timaeus* to Aristotle's *Physics*? Proclus' Critique of Aristotle's Causal Explanation of the Physical World', in: R. W. Sharples and A. Sheppard (eds.) 2003a: 175–187.
- (2004), 'Au-delà de tout nom: *Parménide* 142 A 3–4', in: B. Janssens & B. Roosen & P. Van Deun (eds.), *Philomathestatos*. Studies in Greek Patristic and Byzantine Texts Presented to Jacques Noret for his Sixty-Fifth Birthday (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 137) (Leuven) 603–624.
- Stern, J. (2003), 'Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ Ἀρίστων, On Unbelievable Tales', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133: 51–97.
- Strange, S. K. (1992), *Porphyry on Aristotle Categories* (London).
- Tarrant, H. (2000), *Plato's First Interpreters* (London).
- Thomas, R. (2000), *Herodotus in Context: Ethnography, Science and the Art of Persuasion* (London).
- Tieleman, T. (1996), *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul: Argument and Refutation in the De Placitis Books II–III* (Leiden).
- Trouillard, J. (1974), 'L'activité onomastique selon Proclus', in: H. Dörrie (ed.), *De Jamblique à Proclus* (Genève) 239–255.
- Van den Berg, R. M. (1997), 'Proclus, *In Platonis Timaeum Commentarii* 3.333.28ff: The Myth of the Winged Charioteer according to Iamblichus and Proclus', in: H. J. Blumenthal and J. F. Finamore (eds.), *Iamblichus: The Philosopher (= Syllecta Classica 8)* 149–162.
- (2001), *Proclus' Hymns. Essays, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden).
- (2001b), review of Boys-Stones 2001, *Hermathena* 170: 104–107.
- (2003), '"Becoming like god" according to Proclus' interpretations of the *Timaeus*, the Eleusinian mysteries, and the *Chaldaean Oracles*', in: R. W. Sharples and A. Sheppard (eds.) 2003: 189–202.
- (2005), '"Live Unnoticed": The Invisible Neoplatonic Politician', in: A. Smith (ed.) 2005: 101–115.
- (2006), 'Does it matter to call God Zeus? Origen *Contra Celsum* I 24–25 and the Greek tradition on divine names', in: G. H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Revelation of the Name of YHWH to Moses: Perspectives from Judaism, the Pagan Graeco-Roman World, and Early Christianity* (Leiden) 169–183.
- Van Riel, G. & Macé, C. (eds.) (2004), *Platonic Ideas and Concept Formation in Ancient and Medieval Thought* (Leuven).
- Verlinsky, A. (2005), 'Epicurus and his Predecessors on the Origin of Language', in: D. Frede & B. Inwood (eds.) 2005: 56–100.
- Vorwerk, M. (2001), *Plotins Schrift "Über den Geist, die Ideen und das Seiende": Enneade V 9 [5]. Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (München).
- Weidemann, H. (1994), *Aristoteles Peri Hermeneias. Übersetzt und erläutert* (Berlin).
- Westerink, L. G. (1990), 'The Alexandrian Commentators and the Introductions to Their Commentaries' (= L. G. Westerink (1962), *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* (Amsterdam), 'Introduction', pp. x–xxxii), in: R. Sorabji (ed.) 1990: 325–348.
- Whitaker, C. W. A. (1996), *Aristotle's De Interpretatione: Contradiction and Dialectic* (Oxford).

- White, N. P. (1997), 'Sophist', in: Cooper (ed.) 1997: 235–293.
- Winston, D. (1991), 'Aspect's of Philo's Linguistic Theory', in: D. T. Runia *et al.* (eds.), *Heirs of the Septuagint: Philo, Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity*. Festschrift for Earl Hilgert (= The Studia Philonica Annual 3) (Atlanta) 109–125.

## INDEX OF PASSAGES CITED

Albinus		<i>Categoriae</i>	
<i>Prologos</i>		1a1	65n.13
3 p. 148, 31	38n.25	1a6–8	84n.79
Alcinous		3b10	65n.10
<i>Didaskalikos</i>		7a6–22	70n.28
c. 3, 153, 25–28	38n.26	<i>De Anima</i>	
c. 4, 3	116n.63	II 5, 418a3–6	21n.40
c. 5, 156, 24–28	39n.33	III 4, 429a13–18	21n.41
c. 6, 159, 43–160, 41	37–43	III 4, 430a3–4	21n.41
c. 10, 165, 4	40	<i>De Generatione Animalium</i>	
c. 27, 181, 5–6	40	769b10 ff.	126n.81
Alexander of Aphrodisias		<i>De Generatione et Corruptione</i>	
<i>In Aristotelis Metaphysica commentaria</i>		314a4	26
322, 30 ff.	119n.68	315b16	27n.56
443, 12 ff.	119n.68	318b18–33	27n.58
590, 7 ff.	119n.68	<i>De Interpretatione</i>	
<i>In Aristotelis Topicorum libros</i>		16a3–9	20–21; 155
87, 1–2	113n.54	16a19–21	202
Ammonius		16a26–29	22
<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>		16b13	204n.8
8, 15–19	202n.2	16b33–17a3	22–24
9, 10–11	205n.11	17a1–2	122n.73; 123
11, 11–14	206	<i>De Sensu</i>	
33, 24–25	206n.12	437a9–16	23
<i>In Aristotelis de Interpretatione</i>		<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>	
1, 6–11	203n.4	1107b2	28n.60
24, 24–29	209n.25	1107b7–9	28n.60
34, 17–20	202n.3	1123a34–35	27
34, 22–32	202	1129a31–b1	24n.50
35, 1–5	203	1140b11–12	27
37, 3–7	204	<i>Historia Animalium</i>	
37, 14–17	204n.8	III 12, 519a18–20	169
63, 4–5	171n.28	<i>Metaphysica</i>	
63, 7–18	123n.74	982b12–19	192n.94
Anonymous		991a5–8	65n.13
<i>Prolegomena in Platonis Philosophiam</i>		<i>Physica</i>	
X 26, 34–39	79; 137n.8	B 1, 192b120–23	107
Aristotle		B 6, 197b29f.	204n.8
<i>Analytica Posteriora</i>			
II 10, 93b29–35	25		
II 19	25n.51		



<i>Rhetorica</i>		I 264–265	119n.70
III 2, 1404b1 ff.	57n.84	I 346	208
		I 474	119n.70
<i>Topica</i>		I 480	150n.49
105a18	113n.54	I 525	182n.61
164a12–b7	119		
		<i>In Philebum</i>	
Athenaeus		24	211
<i>Deipnosophistae</i>			
2, 1, 19–22	47	Derveni-papyrus	
		col. XIV	178n.51
<i>Chaldaean Oracles</i>			
8	183	Dexippus	
16	186	<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>	
17	186n.77	17, 1–3	85n.81;
87	146n.33		210n.29
108	146n.34	41, 25–30	72
109	147		
116	164n.13	Diogenes Laertius	
132	164n.13; 187	III 50	38n.25
145	165	III 57–58	43n.42
		VII 200, 9	34n.9
Cicero		X 13–14	58n.85
<i>Academica</i>			
I 32	45	Diogenes of Oenoanda	
II 30	46n.52	10, 2, 11–5, 15	37n.20
<i>De Finibus</i>		Dionysius of Halicarnassos	
V 59	46n.52	<i>De compositione verborum</i>	
		61, 18–63, 3	38n.29
<i>De Natura Deorum</i>			
II 24	190n.88	Elias	
		<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>	
Cornutus		123, 1–3	76n.48
<i>Epidrome</i>			
c. 28 p. 52, 4–7; 14–17	36n.17	Epicurus	
c. 28 p. 54, 12–21	49n.61	<i>Epistula ad Herodotum</i>	
c. 35 p. 76, 2–5	35n.16	75–76	22n.44; 36
Damascius		Eusebius	
<i>De Principiis</i>		<i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>	
I 17 p. 75, 17–76, 2	99n.13	XI 6	38n.25
II 91, 24–92, 4	213n.40		
II 198, 10–199, 20	170n.25	Galenus	
		<i>De anatomicis administrationibus libri</i>	
<i>In Parmenidem</i>		II 581	56
II 78, 1–8	213n.40		
III 42, 13–16	213n.40	<i>De methodo medendi libri (MM)</i>	
III 59, 10–11	213n.40	X 8	57
		X 71	58
<i>In Phaedonem</i>			
I 49, 5	119n.70	<i>De placitis Hippocratis et Platonis (PHP)</i>	
I 57	119n.70	II 2, 5–7	56n.80
I 184	119n.70		
I 262, 10	119n.70		

Hermeias		Origenes	
<i>In Phaedrum</i>		<i>Contra Celsum</i>	
148, 15–150, 15	185n.75	I 24	33
154, 17–27	185n.75	I 24–25	80n.60
260, 22–28	193n.104		
		<i>Orphica</i>	
Hesiodus		Frg. 85	166
<i>Theogonia</i>			
187–200	189	Philo of Alexandria	
		<i>De mutatione nominum (Mut.)</i>	
Hierocles		13	70n.27
<i>In Carmen Aureum</i>		64	54
XXV	79		
XXXV	100n.15	<i>De opificio mundi (Opif.)</i>	
		150	54
Homerus			
<i>Ilias</i>		<i>De plantatione (Plant.)</i>	
3, 277	172	165	52n.67
<i>Odyssea</i>		<i>De specialibus legibus (Spec.)</i>	
12, 374–90	172	4, 235	52n.67
Iamblichus		<i>De virtutibus (Virt.)</i>	
<i>De Mysteriis</i>		14	52n.67
VII 4–5	79–81		
VII 5	71n.30	<i>De vita Moysis (Mos.)</i>	
		2, 39–40	52
Lucretius			
V 1050–5	37n.20	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim (QG)</i>	
		1, 20	53; 55; 56n.78
Marinus			
<i>Proclus</i>		Philoponus	
§ 8, 1–2	129n.91	<i>In Aristotelis Physica</i>	
§ 9	137n.7	96, 8–10	112
§ 30	86n.82		
§ 30, 6f.	212	Plato	
		<i>Alcibiades 1</i>	
Old Testament		129e	156n.70
<i>Gen.</i>		111a1–4	89
2:19	53		
		<i>Cratylus</i>	
Olympiodorus		383a1–2	101n.20
<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>		383a3	102
18, 26–29	209n.25	383a–384a	43n.41
		383a–391b3	2–5
<i>In Gorgiam</i>		384b3	11n.17
5, 19	122	384d2–5	110
9, 2 and 3	112n.53	385a	3n.2; 113; 114
45, 2	119n.70	385b2–d1	9n.13
47	215	386a8–b8	121
		386b9–386d7	121
<i>In Phaedonem</i>		386d8–e5	120
I §§ 4–6	214n.43	386d9–e1	3; 15
I § 5	214	386e4–387d	118
I § 6	190n.87	386e6–387b7	120

387a-388b	118	411e4 ff.	27
387b8-c3	120	411e-412a	74
387c6-10	120	412a	117
387d10	118	412c7 ff.	7n.9
388b	122	414c4 ff.	80
388b13-c1	3; 39	414c5	160n.85
388c9-389a4	139	415a-415e	50
389d-390a	52; 56n.78;	415d4-5	40
	147	421b	50
390b-d	156	421b7	213n.40
390e6-391a3	114n.58	424b10	83
391b4-427d3	5-6	426b	141
391b9-c5	102n.27	426c1-3	83
391c10 ff.	113	427c8-d1	83n.72
391c10-392b2	114n.59	427d4-440e7	6-8
391e-392b	162n.4	430d10-11	139n.16
392b-395e	123	434c4-5	34
393b-c	125	435c3-6	6
393c-394b	128	436b5-11	7
394d	126n.82	437a	51; 117
394e8-11	100n.17; 127	437a4-5	73
394e-395d	128	437d10-438a2	9n.13
395a-b	130	438a3-b4	9n.13
395c-e	130	438d-e	67n.19
396a	48; 175; 183	439b4-8	7-8
396a-b	180	439c3-4	8n.10
396b	158n.76	439d5-6	117
396b6-7	213n.40	440b4-6	117
396b-c	15n.32; 117;		
	184-187	<i>Leges</i>	
396c	186	644d8	193
396c4	177	714a1-2	142n.25
397a5-397c1	100	803c4-5	193
397b	117	893b	181
397d4	50		
397d4-5	124n.77	<i>Parmenides</i>	
398d-e	74	130e5-131a2	19; 81
399c	105	135c1	89n.97
400a8-10	40	135d5	91n.104
400c	177n.47	142a3 ff.	163
401c	50	142a3-6	216
401c4-9	63		
401d	74	<i>Phaedo</i>	
402b2-4	213n.40	74a-d	84
406b-d	189	102b	19
406c2-3	40n.57;		
	189n.83	<i>Phaedrus</i>	
407e1-408d5	7n.9	229c6-230a7	14n.26;
408b-d	117		179n.54
410d	52n.67	238c	86; 105
411b	117	247c	170
411b3-6	6; 15	252b	86; 105;
411d-412c	50; 51		162n.3
411e	52n.67	265b2-c3	150n.49

<i>Philebus</i>		Plotinus	
12c	110; 211–213	I 3 [20] 3	137n.4
16c	136	I 3 [20] 4, 18–23	137n.5
		I 3 [20] 5, 8–12	137n.6
<i>Politicus</i>		III 7 [45] 4, 42–43	64n.7
261e1–262a2	11	III 7 [45] 6, 23	64n.8
262c10–d8	12	III 7 [45] 6, 27–29	64
268d–274e	158n.77	III 8 [30] 11, 38–39	63n.6
272b8	158	III 9 [30] 6, 36–38	67n.20
272b–d	16n.33	IV 3 [27] 30, 7–10	144n.26
275d4–6	12n.19	V I [10] 3, 7–9	144n.27
275e4–9	12n.20	V 1 [10] 4, 9–12	63n.6
		V 5 [32] 5, 14–28	63
<i>Respublica</i>		V 8 [31] 1, 32–40	86n.82
375d–376a	130	V 9 [5] 7	73n.39
378b8–e4	179n.54	V 9 [5] 8, 7–8	73n.39
596a	19	VI 2 [43] 1, 17–21	65
596d7–e2	107	VI 2 [43] 1, 21–23	65n.11
597b	148	VI 2 [43] 1, 23–28	65
619c6	128n.87	VI 2 [43] 1, 30–33	67n.18
		VI 3 [44] 9, 30–31	84
<i>Sophista</i>		VI 3 [44] 1, 6	64n.9
218d8–221c5	10	Plutarchus	
221b7–c3	10	<i>De Iside et Osiride</i>	
261–263	24n.49	c. 2, 351e	47
263e3–5	143	c. 3, 352c	48n.58
267d4–e3	16	c. 29, 362d	48
		c. 32, 363d	49
<i>Symposium</i>		c. 33, 364a	49n.62
207a5ff.	190n.85	c. 60, 375c	51
		c. 60, 375c–d	50
<i>Theaetetus</i>		c. 67, 377f–378a	48
206d1–5	143; 203n.6		
209c	124	<i>Quaestionum convivialium libri</i>	
<i>Timaeus</i>		715a	47
27d5–7	65n.12	746b	47
28b3–5	169		
28c4–5	183	Porphyrius	
29b4–c3	116	<i>De Abstinencia</i>	
29d2	116	III 3	144n.27
29e1–3	145		
36c4–5	143	<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>	
37c6–d2	145	55, 3–7	69n.23
41a	180	55, 6–7	70n.25
41a–d	152	55, 8–14	69
41c5f.	152	57, 5–7	71
41d1–2	152	58, 23	73
41e2–3	142	91, 2–4	84
42d2–3	142	91, 19–25	72
42d6	152n.57		
49d–e	84	<i>Fragments</i>	
		168F	73
		274F 2–6	74

356F	74n.43	XVII	106–109
357aF	75	XVII p. 8, 4–7	36n.19
358F	74n.43	XVIII	105n.34
<i>Rhetorica</i>		XX p. 8, 24–25	109n.44
F 2a	74	XXII	102n.25
		XXIX p. 10, 20–22	102n.27
<i>Sententiae</i>		XXX p. 10, 23–26	110
42	70	XXX p. 10, 29–11, 1	110n.45
		XXX p. 11, 1f.	102n.27
		XXX p. 11, 1–6	110
Proclus		XXXIII	112–118
<i>Chaldaean Philosophy</i>		XXXIII p. 11, 21–22	102n.27
V p. 211, 18–22	147n.36	XXXVI–XXXVII	114n.61
		XXXVIII	114n.61
<i>De Malorum Subsistentia</i>		XXXVIII p. 12, 24–27	121
60, 6–21	126n.81	XXXIX p. 12, 28–30	121
		XL	121
<i>Elementatio Theologica</i>		XLI p. 13, 10–18	121
Prop. 140 p. 125, 1–3	97	XLII p. 13, 19–27	120
		XLIII p. 13, 28–14, 2	120
<i>Hymni</i>		XLIV p. 14, 3–9	120
II 11–12	190n.85	XLV p. 14, 10–30	120
VII 11–15	194n.105	XLVI	114n.61; 113; 114; 118–121
<i>In Alcibiadem</i>		XLVII	121–122
8, 1–4	138n.13	XLVIII	113; 122–3
14, 10–13	113	XLIX	122n.73; 123
22, 13–18	115	L	157n.73
73, 8–75, 13	156n.70	LI	139–146
79, 17–80, 22	171n.30	LI p. 18, 25	99n.15
150	147	LI p. 19, 11	109n.43
258, 21–259, 21	89–91	LI p. 19, 20–24	195n.107
259	104n.30	LI p. 20, 18–21	157n.73
293, 17 ff.	113n.55	LI p. 20, 19–20	171; 210n.32
		LII	146–147
<i>In Cratylum</i>		LIII	148–151
I	116	LIII p. 22, 4–6	152n.59
I p. 1, 1–9	96–98	LIII p. 22, 5	152n.57
I p. 3, 7–8	109n.43	LIV–LV	151–154
II–IX	135–139	LV p. 24, 8–11	152n.59
IV p. 2, 21	137n.6	LVI	149–150
IX p. 3, 24	79n.59	LVI p. 24, 17–18	157n.73
X p. 4, 6–24	98–101	LVII	154–155
X p. 4, 16–18	109n.43	LVIII	155–156
X p. 4, 23–4	102n.25	LXI	159
XIII p. 5, 5–10	99n.12, 14	LXI p. 26, 26–27	160n.85
XIV p. 5, 11–17	101n.21	LXIII	156–159
XIV p. 5, 17–20	102n.26	LXIII p. 27, 14–15	150n.49
XIV p. 5, 21–22	101n.21	LXIV–LXVII	159–160
XVI p. 5, 27–6, 19	90n.103	LXV	113n.56
XVI p. 6, 21–23	85n.81	LXVI	113n.56
XVI p. 7, 22	102n.24	LXVII p. 29, 6–12	102n.27
XVI p. 8, 1–4	102n.24	LXX	162n.5
XVI–XVII	103–106	LXXI	94n.3; 162–170

LXXI p. 32, 7-9	171n.28	III 825, 21-23	153
LXXI p. 33, 14	147	III 827, 26-829, 21	148; 151
LXXII p. 35, 16-19	170n.27	III 829, 11	150n.49
LXXII-LXXIX	170-172	IV 849, 16-853, 12	81-89
LXXXI	123-125	IV 852, 27-32	101
LXXXI p. 37, 26-28	124n.78	IV 864, 23-28	97n.9
LXXXII-LXXXIII	125-127	IV 866, 11	112n.52
LXXXV	129n.90	V 982, 19-21	89n.98
LXXXV p. 39, 12-14	171n.28	V 985, 40-986, 7	149n.42
LXXXVIII	127-128	V 990, 1-17	91n.105
LXXXVIII p. 42, 27-43, 6	101n.18	V 1009, 12	115n.62
LXXXVIII p. 43, 4-5	101n.19	V 1032, 6	115n.62
LXXXVIII p. 43, 29	129n.93	V 1036, 4-9	193n.103
LXXXVIII p. 44, 5-8	98n.10	VI 1061, 25-27	176n.41
LXXXIX-XCV	128-131	VI 1061, 35-2062, 11	176
LXXXIX p. 45, 14	129n.93	VII 508, 68-509, 97	185n.76
XC p. 45, 23	129n.93	VII 508, 89-509, 97	164
XCVI	174-175	VII 510, 50-62	164n.12
XCVIII p. 48, 5-6	180	VII 512, 7-20	166n.18
XCIX	180-184	VII 1174, 20-27	99n.13
XCIX pp. 48, 13-51, 13	177n.45	VII 1191, 3-5	70n.27
C-CII	180-184		
CIII p. 53, 7	129n.93	<i>In Rempublicam</i>	
CV pp. 54, 12-55, 22	177n.45	I 27, 14-18	193
CVI p. 56, 13-23	78n.56	I 83, 15-84, 2	182n.61
CVII p. 56, 24 ff.	63n.6	II 169, 25-170, 26	162n.5
CVII p. 57, 2-13	158n.76	II 271, 6-273, 5	150n.49
CIX p. 59, 19	171	II 298, 9-299, 28	128
CX	180		
CX p. 63, 25-6	164n.13	<i>In Timaeum</i>	
CX-CXIII	184-187	I 18, 25	186n.77
CXIII p. 66, 16-20	166n.19	I 98, 31-99, 7	155n.62
CXV p. 67, 19-20	164n.13	I 99, 13-26	153
CXVI	188-189	I 99, 18-22	153; 155n.62
CXXVIII p. 76, 17	129n.93	I 210, 30-211, 8	147n.35
CXXXIII	94	I 272, 7-274, 32	169n.23
CLVI p. 90, 24-27	177	I 272, 10-274, 20	168n.22
CLXXIV p. 99, 9	115n.62	I 274, 6-9	170n.26
CLXXXI p. 107, 18-24	192	I 276, 16 ff.	104n.30
CLXXXI p. 107, 22-24	193n.100	I 324, 19-22	166n.17
CLXXXI p. 108, 9-12	74n.41	I 340, 21	116
CLXXXI-CLXXXIII	189-191	I 341, 18-21	116
		I 342, 11-25	116n.64
		II 255, 12-24	143
<i>In Euclidem</i>		II 274, 10-278, 25	83n.73
16, 8-10	160n.85	II 274, 18-23	185n.76
141, 17-20	195n.108	III 8, 19-9, 21	88n.90
		III 9, 23-10, 2	88n.91
<i>In Parmenidem</i>		III 10, 2-8	88n.92
I 628, 19-30	102n.27	III 20, 1-21, 6	88n.93
I 637, 4-19	138n.13	III 28, 1-7	88n.94
III 815, 15-833, 19	148	III 29, 12-14	88n.95
III 824, 12-825, 35	148; 153	III 168, 9-20	177n.44
III 825, 13-18	153	III 222, 2-5	144

III 310, 9–311, 6	193n.102	Ps.-Dionysius	
III 333, 28 ff.	86n.85	<i>De divinis nominibus</i>	
III 342, 20–344, 24	107n.39	I 1	216n.48
		I 5–6	216n.49
<i>Theologia Platonica</i>		IX	216
I 5 p. 21, 13–27	188n.82		
I 5 p. 25, 18–23	141n.24; 174	Sextus Empiricus	
I 5 pp. 25, 26–26, 4	176n.44	<i>Adversus Logicos</i>	
I 6 p. 28, 25–29, 10	181n.59	I 9, 3	38n.25
I 6 p. 29, 7–10	181–182		
I 6 p. 29, 14–17	114	<i>Adversus Mathematicos</i>	
I 29 p. 123, 20–21	174n.36	I 241–247	129n.92
I 29 p. 123, 21–124, 2	164n.10		
I 29 p. 124, 7–12	168n.21	Simplicius	
I 29 p. 124, 9–12	210n.31	<i>In Aristotelis Categorias</i>	
I 29 p. 124, 12–20	145	2, 9 ff.	76n.48
I 29 p. 124, 23–125, 2	142	7, 23–32	207n.18
I 29 p. 125, 3–8	111n.48	12, 1–3	207n.19
III 14 p. 51, 20–26	165	12, 13–15	207n.20
III 22 p. 80, 14–15	165n.14	12, 18–19	208n.23
III 22 p. 80, 25	165	12, 26–28	208
IV 5 p. 21, 15–23	178	13, 4–9	209
IV 23 p. 69, 12–15	185n.75	13, 26	209n.28
IV 23 p. 69, 16–22	186	53, 11–12	78n.54
V 3 p. 16, 3–4	192n.98	339, 36–340, 12	76–77
V 3 p. 17, 22–25	187	363, 9–11	78n.53
V 5 pp. 23, 19–24, 21	157n.75	363, 9–14	77
V 6 p. 25, 3	158n.79	363, 11–14	78n.55
V 7–8 pp. 26, 21–30, 6	158n.77	438, 33–36	209n.27
V 20 p. 72, 12–13	183n.64		
V 20 p. 75, 20–26	183n.64	<i>In Aristotelis Physica</i>	
V 22 p. 81, 23–82, 5	183n.64	1249, 12–17	208
V 22 p. 82, 10	183n.68		
V 22 p. 83, 3–11	183n.67	Syrianus	
VI 1–5	145n.30	<i>In Metaphysica</i>	
VI 3 p. 15, 7–14	145n.28	81, 9–13	103
VI 3 p. 16, 2	145n.28	81, 14–16	99
VI 3 p. 16, 2–6	145n.29		
VI 22 p. 98, 14–17	159n.84	Trypho	
		<i>Trop.</i>	
Ps.-Aristeas		192–193	70n.27
<i>Epistula</i>			
16	53	Varro	
		Fr. 113	34n.8

## INDEX OF SUBJECTS AND NAMES

- Adam, first name-giver 53–56
- Alcinous 37–43; 116n.63; 136
- Ammonius 94; 108n.42; 123n.74  
     ‘by nature’ / ‘by imposition’ 202–205  
     *Categories*, on the 205–206  
     *Cratylus*, on the 201–205  
     Simplicius, compared to 206–210
- analogy 149–150; 166; 216
- Antiochus of Ascalon 43–46; 54
- Aphrodite 189–191
- arguments against Hermogenes  
     βιαστικόν 112–113; 118–123  
     ἐντροπικόν 112; 114–118  
     ‘persuasive’ 112; 114; 162
- Aristotle 41; 45; 54–55; 91–92; 95; 99;  
     103–104; 106; 107–108; 133  
     Ammonius, on *Cratylus* and  
         201–205  
     arguments against, Proclus 106; 118;  
         121–122; 123; 155–156  
     *Categories* 61–62; 64–67; 68–73;  
         76–78; 205–206  
     clarity, virtue of language 57  
     definition 25–26  
     language and philosophy 24–28  
     *logos* 22–24  
     names 20–24  
     Plato, relation to 22–24; 28–29;  
         61, 65; 76; 81; 135–138; 155–156;  
         201–205; 208–210
- Basil of Caesarea 124
- chance (τύχη), names given by 100;  
     124; 127–128
- Chaos (Orphic deity) 166–167
- clarity of language 57–58; 69; 89–91
- convention (συνθήκη), linguistic 6–8;  
     71; 82–83; 104–106; 208
- Cornutus 35–36; 49; 74; 192
- correctness of names  
     Aristotle 27–29  
     Plato: two types of 17–19; 28–29  
     Proclus 93–133
- Cratylus* 6–8  
     Proclus on 98–109  
     Ammonius on 202–203
- Cratylus passim*  
     ‘character’ 38; 135–139  
     curriculum, place in 78–79; 137  
     *dramatis personae* 98–106  
     σκοπός 96–98; 109  
     title of 42–43; 57
- Cronus 156–160; 178; 187; 189;  
     214–215
- Damascius 211–213
- Demiurge 131; 139–146; 150–159;  
     180–184; 191  
     divine name-giver 142–147  
     king Dionysus 192–195
- Democritus 22; 104–106; 211–213
- Derveni-papyrus 178–179
- dialectic 4–5; 37–38; 46; 89; 134–139  
     Cronus, the divine dialectician  
         156–159  
     dialectical interpretation of *Crat.*  
         8–17  
     Socrates, the human dialectician  
         159–160
- Diodorus Cronus 82; 111
- Dionysus 189–195; 214
- divine language 162; 168–170  
     a paradox? 170–172
- divine name 46–51; 74–75; 79–81;  
     110–112; 140–142; 161–197;  
     211–213; 213–217  
     4 types of 168–170
- Egg (Orphic deity) 166–167
- ἐλληνίζειν 58; 70; 82; 89–91; 129n.92;  
     132n.102
- Epicurus 36–37  
     clarity 58  
     criticism of Plato 36–37; 55  
     Proclus on 36; 106–109
- essential definition  
     see nominal definition
- Ether (Orphic deity) 166
- ἐτυμολογία 129
- etymology  
     Alcinous 38–39  
     Aristotle 27–28  
     correctness of 14–15; 18–19



- Cratylus*, in 5–6; 13–19; 37–38  
 Galen 56–57  
 game at symposia 47; 189n.84  
 Olympiodorus 213–216  
 pedagogical function of 187–192  
 Philo of Alexandria 52–53  
 Plotinus 63–64  
 Porphyry 73–75  
 Proclus' method of 129; 180–184  
 Socrates does not practice  
     etymology 5n.7  
 Stoics 34; 37–38  
 τέχνη, a 128–129  
 Euthyphro 179; 188–189  
 evil 126
- Form 18–19; 64–67; 81; 83–84; 86–87;  
     90; 91; 104; 115; 126; 133; 145; 152;  
     157; 185; 193; 208  
     artifacts, of 148–151  
     individuals, of 123–125; 148
- Galen 56–58  
 grammarians, ancient 129
- Henads 163–164  
 Heraclitus the Paradoxographer 192  
 Hermes 159–160  
 Hermogenes 2–5; 13; 203–204  
     Proclus on 98–106; 109–123  
 Hesiod 177; 189  
 Hierocles of Alexandria 79; 211n.34  
 Homer 114; 162; 168–170; 172; 174  
 homonymy 64–67; 72; 77–78; 84–86;  
     105; 210
- Iamblichus 71; 76–81; 96; 111; 119;  
     154–155  
 Intellect (Νοῦς) 104; 131; 135–142;  
     159–160; 190; 208–209  
     Cronus, triad of 157  
     Intellect in us 194  
     name-giver, as 142–147  
 intelligible gods, names of 165–167  
 'Iunges', example of inspired name 168
- κατάχρησις 70; 82  
 κλιματάρχαι 154  
 Kripke, S. 132
- μετάθεσις 105; 110  
 Metis 166  
 monsters, naming of 125–127  
 myths  
     Christians and 215–216
- instrument of education 187–188  
 playthings 193–195
- name  
     Aristotle, on 20–24; 26–28  
     barbaric 48–49; 52–53; 154–155  
     divine, see 'divine names'  
     form, of 4; 148–151  
     matter, of 151–154  
     Plato, on 2–20  
     stability of 114–118  
     two types of, Proclus 98–101  
     tool, philosophical 3–4; 18–19;  
         34–35; 39–41; 64; 72–73; 122–123;  
         173–195; 208–209; 211–217  
 name-givers, first 7; 15–16; 18–19; 27;  
     36–37; 49–51; 53–56; 79  
 nature, by (φύσει)  
     Alcinous 41–43  
     Ammonius on 'by nature' 202–205  
     Iamblichus 71  
     Plato 2–5  
     Proclus on 'by nature' 82–83;  
         106–109  
     two senses of names 'by nature'  
         33–34  
 νοερά θεωρία 76–78  
 nominal definition 26; 73; 87–88  
 notion (έννοια) 46; 181–182; 189–191
- Olympiodorus 213–216  
 One, the 163–164; 185; 209; 216  
 oracles 171  
 ordinary language 17–19; 26–29; 34–35;  
     57–58; 69–70; 73; 87–88; 89–90  
 Orpheus 146; 165–166; 174; 213–215  
     Orphic myth of Dionysus 194–195  
     Orphic theogony 175–179  
 οὐσιώδεις λόγοι 87; 89; 104
- patron divinities of the arts 150  
 personal names 123–131  
     cluster theory of, Searle's 124  
     εἶδος of 123–125  
     failed names 125–127  
     how to explain correct 127–128  
 Phanes 166–168  
 Philo of Alexandria 52–56  
 plaything, of the young gods 192–195  
 Plotinus 62–67; 77–78; 84–88; 144  
     attitude towards Aristotle 68–69;  
         121; 136–137  
 Plutarch of Chaironeia 46–51; 75;  
     196  
 πολωννμία 105

- Porphyry 68–78; 82–92; 106; 111; 124;  
     136; 202; 205  
 prayers 171  
 πρόσληψις 119  
 Ps.-Dionysius 216–217  
 Putnam, H. 132n.102  
 puzzles (ἀπορίαι) 99; 103  
 Pythagoras 90; 103–104; 146; 174  
  
 scholia 94  
 Simplicius 205; 206–210  
 Socrates, Proclus on 98–101; 159–160  
 soul 96–98; 104  
     communicate, needs language  
         to 171; 208–209  
     ‘flower of intellect’ 175  
     image-making power of 139–142  
     salvation of 192–195; 208–209  
     writing tablet, compared to 160  
 statues, of gods 74–75; 111; 139–142;  
     170; 175; 194; 211–213  
 Stoics 33–36; 38–39; 44–46; 49; 51; 52;  
     55; 57; 74; 179; 181–182  
     tacitly criticized by Proclus 190  
 syllogistic reformulation 118–121  
 symbols, theurgical 146–147  
 synonymy 84–85; 210  
 Syrianus 99; 103; 119; 176; 185  
  
 Tantalus, names of the members of the  
     house of 128–131  
 Theodorus of Asine 83; 184–187; 196  
 theogony, Orphic and Neoplatonic  
     theology 175–179; 213–217  
 theology 35–36; 46–51; 211–217  
     Neoplatonic theology and  
         Christianism 215–217  
     Proclus on etymology and 173–187  
 theurgy 140–142; 146–147; 150;  
     154–155; 165–166; 170  
 Time (Orphic deity) 166–167  
 Titans 194; 214  
  
 umpire (δαιτητής), philosopher as 99;  
     103; 145  
 Universe, names of 169–170  
 Uranus 178; 180; 184–187; 191;  
     212–213; 214  
  
 young gods 152–154; 160; 191; 193  
  
 Zeus 131; 156–160; 178; 214–215  
     etymology of 180–184



# PHILOSOPHIA ANTIQUA

A SERIES OF STUDIES ON ANCIENT PHILOSOPHY

EDITED BY

K.A. ALGRA, F.A.J. DE HAAS, J. MANSFELD  
C.J. ROWE, D.T. RUNIA, CH. WILDBERG

## *Recent volumes in the series*

13. Nicolaus Damascenus. *On the Philosophy of Aristotle*. Fragments of the First Five Books, Translated from the Syriac with an Introduction and Commentary by H. J. Drossaart Lulofs. Reprint of the 1st (1965) ed. 1969. ISBN 90 04 01725 9
14. Edelstein, L. *Plato's Seventh Letter*. 1966. ISBN 90 04 01726 7
17. Gould, J. B. *The Philosophy of Chrysippus*. Reprint 1971. ISBN 90 04 01729 1
18. Boeft, J. den. *Calcidius on Fate*. His Doctrine and Sources. 1970. ISBN 90 04 01730 5
20. Bertier, J. *Mnésithée et Dieuchès*. 1972. ISBN 90 04 03468 4
21. Timaios Lokros. *Über die Natur des Kosmos und der Seele*. Kommentiert von M. Baltes. 1972. ISBN 90 04 03344 0
23. Iamblichus Chalcidensis. *In Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta*. Edited with Translation and Commentary by J. M. Dillon. 1973. ISBN 90 04 03578 8
24. Timaeus Locrus. *De natura mundi et animae*. Überlieferung, Testimonia, Text und Übersetzung von W. Marg. Editio maior. 1972. ISBN 90 04 03505 2
26. Gersh, S. E. *Κίνησις ἀκίνητος*. A Study of Spiritual Motion in the Philosophy of Proclus. 1973. ISBN 90 04 03784 5
27. O'Meara, D. *Structures hiérarchiques dans la pensée de Plotin*. Étude historique et interprétative. 1975. ISBN 90 04 04372 1
28. Todd, R. B. *Alexander of Aphrodisias on the Stoic Physics*. A Study of the *De Mixtione* with Preliminary Essays, Text, Translation and Commentary. 1976. ISBN 90 04 04402 7
29. Scheffel, W. *Aspekte der platonischen Kosmologie*. Untersuchungen zum Dialog 'Timaios'. 1976. ISBN 90 04 04509 0
31. Edlow, R. B. *Galen on Language and Ambiguity*. An English Translation of Galen's *De Captionibus* (On Fallacies), With Introduction, Text and Commentary. 1977. ISBN 90 04 04869 3
34. Epiktet. *Vom Kynismus*. Herausgegeben und übersetzt mit einem Kommentar von M. Billerbeck. 1978. ISBN 90 04 05770 6
35. Baltes, M. *Die Weltentstehung des platonischen Timaios nach den antiken Interpreten*. Teil 2. Proklos. 1979. ISBN 90 04 05799 4
39. Tarán, L. *Speusippus of Athens*. A Critical Study with a Collection of the Related Texts and Commentary. 1982. ISBN 90 04 06505 9
41. O'Brien, D. *Theories of Weight in the Ancient World*. Four Essays on Democritus, Plato and Aristotle. A Study in the Development of Ideas 2. Plato: Weight and Sensation. The Two Theories of the 'Timaeus'. 1984. ISBN 90 04 06934 8
45. Aujoulat, N. *Le Néo-Platonisme Alexandrin: Hiérocès d'Alexandrie*. Filiations intellectuelles et spirituelles d'un néo-platonicien du Ve siècle. 1986. ISBN 90 04 07510 0
46. Kal, V. *On Intuition and Discursive Reason in Aristotle*. 1988. ISBN 90 04 08308 1
48. Evangeliou, Ch. *Aristotle's Categories and Porphyry*. 1988. ISBN 90 04 08538 6

49. Bussanich, J. *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*. A Commentary on Selected Texts. 1988. ISBN 90 04 08996 9
50. Simplicius. *Commentaire sur les Catégories*. Traduction commentée sous la direction de I. Hadot. I: Introduction, première partie (p. 1-9, 3 Kalbfleisch). Traduction de Ph. Hoffmann (avec la collaboration d'I. et P. Hadot). Commentaire et notes à la traduction par I. Hadot avec des appendices de P. Hadot et J.-P. Mahé. 1990. ISBN 90 04 09015 0
51. Simplicius. *Commentaire sur les Catégories*. Traduction commentée sous la direction de I. Hadot. III: Préambule aux Catégories. Commentaire au premier chapitre des Catégories (p. 21-40, 13 Kalbfleisch). Traduction de Ph. Hoffmann (avec la collaboration d'I. Hadot, P. Hadot et C. Luna). Commentaire et notes à la traduction par C. Luna. 1990. ISBN 90 04 09016 9
52. Magee, J. *Boethius on Signification and Mind*. 1989. ISBN 90 04 09096 7
54. Fortenbaugh, W.W., et al. (eds.) *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09440 7 set
55. Shankman, A. *Aristotle's De insomniis*. A Commentary. ISBN 90 04 09476 8
56. Mansfeld, J. *Heresiography in Context*. Hippolytos' *Elenchos* as a Source for Greek Philosophy. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09616 7
57. O'Brien, D. *Théodicée plotinienne, théodicée gnostique*. 1993. ISBN 90 04 09618 3
58. Baxter, T.M.S. *The Cratylus*. Plato's Critique of Naming. 1992. ISBN 90 04 09597 7
59. Dorandi, T. (Hrsg.) *Theodor Gomperz. Eine Auswahl herkulanischer kleiner Schriften (1864-1909)*. 1993. ISBN 90 04 09819 4
60. Filodemo. *Storia dei filosofi. La stoà da Zenone a Panezio* (PHerc. 1018). Edizione, traduzione e commento a cura di T. Dorandi. 1994. ISBN 90 04 09963 8
61. Mansfeld, J. *Prolegomena*. Questions to be Settled Before the Study of an Author, or a Text. 1994. ISBN 90 04 10084 9
62. Flannery, S.J., K.L. *Ways into the Logic of Alexander of Aphrodisias*. 1995. ISBN 90 04 09998 0
63. Lakmann, M.-L. *Der Platoniker Tauros in der Darstellung des Aulus Gellius*. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10096 2
64. Sharples, R.W. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Volume 5. Sources on Biology (Human Physiology, Living Creatures, Botany: Texts 328-435). 1995. ISBN 90 04 10174 8
65. Algra, K. *Concepts of Space in Greek Thought*. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10172 1
66. Simplicius. *Commentaire sur le manuel d'Épictète*. Introduction et édition critique de texte grec par Ilsetraut Hadot. 1995. ISBN 90 04 09772 4
67. Cleary, J.J. *Aristotle and Mathematics*. Aporetic Method in Cosmology and Metaphysics. 1995. ISBN 90 04 10159 4
68. Tieleman, T. *Galen and Chrysippus on the Soul*. Argument and Refutation in the *De Placitis* Books II-III. 1996. ISBN 90 04 10520 4
69. Haas, F.A.J. de. *John Philoponus' New Definition of Prime Matter*. Aspects of its Background in Neoplatonism and the Ancient Commentary Tradition. 1997. ISBN 90 04 10446 1
71. Andia, Y. de. *Henosis*. L'Union à Dieu chez Denys l'Aréopagite. 1996. ISBN 90 04 10656 1
72. Algra, K.A., Horst, P.W. van der, and Runia, D.T. (eds.) *Polyhistor*. Studies in the History and Historiography of Ancient Philosophy. Presented to Jaap Mansfeld on his Sixtieth Birthday. 1996. ISBN 90 04 10417 8
73. Mansfeld, J. and Runia, D.T. *Aëtiana*. The Method and Intellectual Context of a Doxographer. Volume 1: The Sources. 1997. ISBN 90 04 10580 8
74. Slomkowski, P. *Aristotle's Topics*. 1997. ISBN 90 04 10757 6
75. Barnes, J. *Logic and the Imperial Stoa*. 1997. ISBN 90 04 10828 9
76. Inwood, B. and Mansfeld, J. (eds.) *Assent and Argument*. Studies in Cicero's *Academic Books*. Proceedings of the 7th Symposium Hellenisticum (Utrecht, August 21-25, 1995). 1997. ISBN 90 04 10914 5

77. Magee, J. (ed., tr. & comm.) *Anicii Manlii Severini Boethii De divisione liber*. Critical Edition, Translation, Prolegomena, and Commentary. 1998. ISBN 90 04 10873 4
78. Olympiodorus. *Commentary on Plato's Gorgias*. Translated with Full Notes by R. Jackson, K. Lycos & H. Tarrant. Introduction by H. Tarrant. 1998. ISBN 90 04 10972 2
79. Sharples, R.W. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Volume 3.1. Sources on Physics (Texts 137-223). With Contributions on the Arabic Material by Dimitri Gutas. 1998. ISBN 90 04 11130 1
80. Mansfeld, J. *Prolegomena Mathematica*. From Apollonius of Perga to Late Neoplatonism. With an Appendix on Pappus and the History of Platonism. 1998. ISBN 90 04 11267 7
81. Huby, P. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Volume 4. Psychology (Texts 254-327). With Contributions on the Arabic Material by D. Gutas. 1999. ISBN 90 04 11317 7
82. Boter, G. *The Encheiridion of Epictetus and Its Three Christian Adaptations*. Transmission and Critical Editions. 1999. ISBN 90 04 11358 4
83. Stone, M.E. and Shirinian, M.E. *Pseudo-Zeno. Anonymous Philosophical Treatise*. Translated with the Collaboration of J. Mansfeld and D.T. Runia. 2000. ISBN 90 04 11524 2
84. Bäck, A.T. *Aristotle's Theory of Predication*. 2000. ISBN 90 04 11719 9
85. Riel, G. Van. *Pleasure and the Good Life*. Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonists. 2000. ISBN 90 04 11797 0
86. Baltussen, H. *Theophrastus against the Presocratics and Plato*. Peripatetic Dialectic in the *De sensibus*. 2000/ ISBN 90 04 11720 2
87. Specia, A. *Hypothetical Syllogistic and Stoic Logic*. 2001. ISBN 90 04 12073 4
88. Luna, C. *Trois Études sur la Tradition des Commentaires Anciens à la Métaphysique d'Aristote*. 2001. ISBN 90 04 120074 2
89. Frede, D. & A. Laks (eds.) *Traditions of Theology*. Studies in Hellenistic Theology, its Background and Aftermath. 2001. ISBN 90 04 12264 8
90. Berg, R.M. van den. *Proclus' Hymns*. Essays, Translations, Commentary. 2001. ISBN 90 04 12236 2
91. Rijk, L.M. de. *Aristotle – Semantics and Ontology*. 2 volumes.  
Volume I. General Introduction. The Works on Logic. 2002. ISBN 90 04 12324 5  
Volume II. The Metaphysics. Semantics in Aristotle's Strategy of Argument. 2002. ISBN 90 04 12467 5
92. Finamore, J.F. & J.M. Dillon. *Iamblichus De Anima*. Text, Translation, and Commentary. 2002 ISBN 90 04 12510 8
93. Fortenbaugh, W.W., R.W. Sharples, & M.G. Sollenberger. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. On Sweat, on Dizziness and on Fatigue. 2003. ISBN 90 04 12890 5
94. Tieleman, T. *Chrysippus' On affections*. Reconstruction and Interpretation. 2003. ISBN 90 04 12998 7
95. Görler, W. *Kleine Schriften zur hellenistisch-römischen Philosophie*. Herausgegeben von C. Catrein. 2004. ISBN 90 04 13736 X
96. Polito, R. *The Sceptical Road*. Aenesidemus' Appropriation of Heraclitus. 2004. ISBN 90 04 13742 4
97. Fortenbaugh, W.W. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Volume 8. Sources on Rhetoric and Poetics (Texts 666-713). 2005. ISBN 90 04 14247 9
98. Perkams, M. & R.M. Piccione (Hrsg.) *Proklos. Methode, Seelenlehre, Metaphysik*. Akten der Konferenz in Jena am 18.-20. September 2003. 2006. ISBN 90 04 15084 6

99. Schäfer, C. *Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*. An Introduction to the Structure and the Content of the Treatise *On the Divine Names*. 2006. ISBN 90 04 15094 3
100. Delcomminette, S. *Le Philèbe de Platon*. Introduction à l'Agathologie Platonicienne. 2006. ISBN 90 04 15026 9
101. Fortenbaugh, W.W. *Aristotle's Practical Side*. On his Psychology, Ethics, Politics and Rhetoric. 2006. ISBN-10: 90 04 15164 8, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15164 2
102. Brancacci, A. & P.-M. Morel (eds.). *Democritus: Science, The Arts, and the Care of the Soul*. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Democritus (Paris, 18-20 September 2003). 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15160 5, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15160 4
103. Huby, P. *Theophrastus of Eresus*. Sources for his Life, Writings, Thought and Influence. Commentary Volume 2. Logic. With Contributions on the Arabic Material by Dimitri Gutas. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15298 9, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15298 4
104. Sider, D. & C.W. Brunschön (eds.). *Theophrastus of Eresus*. On Weather Signs. 2007. ISBN-10: 90 04 15593 7, ISBN-13: 978 90 04 15593 0
105. Mirhady, D.C. (ed.). *Influences on Peripatetic Rhetoric*. Essays in Honor of William W. Fortenbaugh. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15668 5
106. Bobonich, C. & P. Destrée (eds.). *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy*. From Socrates to Plotinus. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15670 8
107. D'Ancona, C. (ed.). *The Libraries of the Neoplatonists*. Proceedings of the Meeting of the European Science Foundation Network "Late Antiquity and Arabic Thought. Patterns in the Constitution of European Culture" held in Strasbourg, March 12-14, 2004 under the impulsion of the Scientific Committee of the meeting, composed by Matthias Baltes†, Michel Cacouros, Cristina D'Ancona, Tiziano Dorandi, Gerhard Endreß, Philippe Hoffmann, Henri Hugonnard Roche. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15641 8
108. Bonelli, M. *Timée le Sophiste: Lexique Platonicien*. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15887 0
109. Deslauriers, M. *Aristotle on Definition*. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 15669 2
110. Bloch, D. *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*. Text, Translation, Interpretation, and Reception in Western Scholasticism. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 16046 0
111. Roskam, G. 'Live unnoticed'. On the Vicissitudes of an Epicurean Doctrine. 2007. ISBN 978 90 04 16171 9
112. Berg, R.M. van den. *Proclus' Commentary on the Cratylus in Context*. Ancient Theories of Language and Naming. 2008. ISBN 978 90 04 16379 9